Chapter 24

*Early Latin America*

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

Portugal and Spain imposed dependent colonies on the indigenous peoples of Latin America. Initially impressed by Aztec and Incan civilization, the Spanish destroyed their great cities, only to rebuild upon the foundation of both the cities and the empires, repeating a pattern the Aztec and Inca had followed as they conquered previous empires. The colonies of Latin America fully demonstrated the technological advantages enjoyed by Western nations over the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Latin American social hierarchies were deeply affected by the intermarriage of Iberian Europeans with the Native American population and by the importation of African slaves. In the New World, Europeans tended to draw on their experiences from the West, while Native American peoples struggled to maintain their own ways of life. New World colonies were exploitative. Wherever possible, plantation forms of agriculture based on coercive labor systems were established. The mining of precious metals was another aspect of European exploitation of the New World.

II. Spaniards and Portuguese: From Reconquest to Conquest

A. Introduction

The Iberian peninsula formed a frontier between Christian Europe and Islam. For centuries conflict between different cultures was the basis of life. The marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile began the process of uniting the small Christian kingdoms of Spain. Under the Catholic monarchs, Spain completed the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims in 1492. The conclusion of the reconquest was contemporary with the voyage of Christopher Columbus to the New World.

B. Iberian Society and Tradition

Spain and Portugal were heavily urbanized, a characteristic these nations exported to the New World. Spanish and Portuguese colonists, though commoners at home, often attempted to remake themselves as a colonial elite with Indians as their serfs. Households were patriarchal, a trait carried over to the plantation economy of Latin America. The Spanish state depended on a professional bureaucracy and was closely tied to the Church. Plantation agriculture based on slave labor, already established on the Atlantic islands, was readily transported to the Americas.

C. The Chronology of Conquest

There were three phases of the creation of Latin America. In the first, from 1492 to 1570,
colonial administrations were established. Between 1570 and 1700, colonial society and economy reached maturity. During the 18th century, the American colonies underwent significant reform. Between the first voyages of discovery and 1600, the Indian empires of Latin America were destroyed and African slavery was introduced. Mexico and Peru became the focal points of Spanish settlement.

D. The Caribbean Crucible

The islands of the Caribbean, the first regions placed under Spanish rule, provided models for the subsequent development of the American mainland. The Taino Indians were distributed in grants, or encomienda, to individual Spaniards as agricultural laborers. Disease rapidly decimated the indigenous population, and the islands declined as economic centers until the introduction of sugar plantations and African slavery. Caribbean cities were laid out on grid plans with a central plaza featuring a church and a governor's palace. Royal administration included the governorship, the treasury, and a royal court staffed by trained legalists. Christian missionaries accompanied the first colonists, and Roman Catholicism was rapidly established in the New World. Early attempts to exploit mineral wealth on the islands was supplanted by settlement in the early 16th century. New colonists founded ranches and sugar plantations. Settlement led to the destruction of the indigenous population and the importation of African slaves as a source of coercive labor, while some clerics and royal officials sought to lessen the abuses against the Native Americans. Movement from island to island was through private investment and initiative.

E. The Paths of Conquest

Individual initiatives consisting of small expeditions of military men led to the conquest of Mexico, Central America, and South America. In Mexico, Hernán Cortés and 600 men toppled the Aztec Empire by 1521. The Spanish colonial capital of Mexico City was built on the ruins of Tenochtitlán. Much of central Mexico was under Spanish domination by 1535 and incorporated into the colonial government of New Spain. From New Spain, the Spanish expanded into Central America and northward into the American southwest. A second voyage of conquest moved from the Caribbean to Panama and then south to the Inca Empire. Francisco Pizarro, taking advantage of internal strife among the Incas, conquered the Inca capital in 1533. Pizarro completed the conquest of much of Peru by 1540. Voyages of discovery fanned out from the initial conquests. Francisco Vázquez de Coronado explored the American southwest in search of gold, while Pedro de Valdivia pressed Spanish exploration along the Andes from Peru into Chile. Other explorers penetrated the Amazon basin and the plains of South America. By 1570, there were 192 Spanish cities and towns in the new colonies.

F. The Conquerors

In most cases, Spanish conquerors proceeded on the basis of contracts with the Spanish crown in which they were promised authority in the conquered territories in return for payments of bullion to the royal government. Forces were recruited through grants of shares of booty and profits. Inequitable distribution of the American spoils often led to internal dissatisfaction among the conquerors. Few of the conquerors were professional soldiers. Most were simply men seeking profit from risk and adventure. Europeans were aided in their defeat of Native Americans by advanced technology, possession of horses, and the vulnerability of indigenous peoples to disease. Internal disputes within the Indian empires also weakened their ability to make effective resistance to European invaders. By about 1570, the age of conquest had
ended. Royal administrators and bureaucrats began to replace adventurers in the colonial government.

G. Conquest and Morality

The Conquest created a series of moral and philosophical questions. Using Aristotle, the Spanish scholar, Gines de Sábulveda, argued that the enslavement was justified because the Native Americans were not fully human. The great Dominican, Las Casas, contested Sábulveda’s views. The crown backed Las Casas but little changed as the result of the debate.

III. The Destruction and Transformation of Indian Societies

A. Introduction

All Native American peoples suffered a catastrophic decline in population as a result of the European conquest of the Americas. The Spanish attempted to concentrate remaining Indian populations in fewer towns and to seize abandoned communal farmland. Demographic decline made it difficult for survivors to maintain traditional social and economic patterns. In Mexico, in particular, the decline in human population was matched by the dramatic increase in the numbers of European domestic animals brought to the New World.

B. Exploitation of the Indians

The Spanish maintained the old Indian nobility as middlemen for their collection of taxation and imposition of labor requirements. Enslavement of Native Americans was forbidden, but labor taxation was common in the form of encomiendas. As the Indian population declined, the value of encomiendas diminished. The institution was much in decline by the 1620s. Colonists thereafter sought grants of land rather than labor. Despite the disappearance of the encomienda, the royal government continued to exact Native American labor as a form of taxation. This practice was called the mita. During the 17th century, Indians began to leave villages and seek private employment as a means of avoiding government labor requirements. Despite European intervention, some Indian culture was retained at the local level.

IV. Colonial Economies and Governments

A. Introduction

The majority of colonists and Indians continued to derive their living from agriculture, but the colonial commercial system was organized around the exploitation of mineral wealth as Latin America became part of the developing world economy.

B. The Silver Heart of Empire

Silver was discovered in both Mexico and Peru. The Potosí mine was the greatest silver producer in the Americas. Mining was carried out through a system of coerced labor dependent on first Indian slaves, then the encomienda, and finally the mita. Since extraction of silver required mercury, the discovery of that metal at Huancavelica in Peru accelerated silver production. Mines were owned privately, but owners were required to send one fifth of all production to the royal government. Silver production rose rapidly after 1580 because of the use of mercury in the extraction process. The mining industry stimulated secondary
economic activities such as farming and transportation.

C. Haciendas and Villages

As the Indian population declined, Spanish farms and ranches were developed. Spanish colonists turned to land with the extinction of the encomienda. Much of the labor force for colonial agriculture continued to be drawn from among the Indian population. Most agricultural production was for consumption in the colonies. Only a small amount of plantation commodities was exported. In areas where Indian villages sustained sufficient population, competition between Spanish haciendas and Indian communal farming existed.

D. Industry and Commerce

The Spanish colonies developed a small woolen textile industry that supplied colonial markets. Spanish commercial objectives were directed at the exploitation of mineral wealth, specifically silver. All American trade with Spain passed through the Casa de Contratación of Seville. Strict control of trade allowed Spanish merchants to keep prices high. To discourage piracy and competition from other European nations, Spanish trade with its colonies was shipped in a convoy system composed of galleons. Trade from Europe passed to fortified ports in the Caribbean and along the American mainland. Although a seemingly endless supply of silver entered Spain, much of it was eventually exported to pay for military service, debts, and a negative balance of trade. Importation of American bullion contributed to sharp inflation in first Spain, then the rest of Europe. Spain’s control of the silver trade permitted its monarchs to incur massive debts on the security of American bullion.

E. Ruling an Empire: State and Church

Spain’s right to its colonial possessions was based on the Treaty of Tordesillas, which divided the world between Portugal and Spain. The Spanish bureaucracy in the New World was staffed by university-trained lawyers from Spain, called letrados. The laws of the Spanish possessions were codified in the Recopilación of 1681. Government in Spain itself was conducted through a series of councils with the Council of the Indies in charge of the colonies. In America, Spain created two viceroyalties, one in Mexico and one in Peru. Viceroyos exercised both military and administrative authority over their dominions. Each viceroyalty was subdivided into judicial regions called audiencias. At an even more local level, magistrates in towns and villages enforced decrees, acted as judges, and collected taxes. Because of the close relationship between the Spanish government and the Church, Catholic orders acted virtually as an arm of the government. Missionaries converted the Indians, and in many cases defended their rights and their culture. In some areas, a more formal structure of parishes and bishoprics replaced the original missionary church. The Church served to stimulate the culture of the colonies in many ways. The construction of buildings offered opportunities for architects and artists. Printing was introduced into the colonies to disseminate religious materials. The Church founded schools and universities to train priests, but their institutions became the primary sources of education for all fields. To control orthodoxy and morality, an Office of the Inquisition was established in the New World. Church and state combined to form an ideological and political framework for the new colonies.
V. Brazil: The First Plantation Colony

A. Introduction

Pedro Alvares Cabral, blown off course while on a voyage to India, discovered Brazil in 1500. The only initial interest shown by the Portuguese government was in the dyewood found along the coast. After 1532, the Portuguese monarchy granted large holdings, or capitaincies, to nobles. Without sufficient capitalization, little effective colonization of the capitancies proved possible. With difficulty, sugar plantations were established using first Indians and then African slaves as a labor supply. In 1549, the Portuguese government established a more formal colonial administration with its capital at Salvador.

B. Sugar and Slavery

From its small beginnings, Brazil became the world's leading sugar producer after 1600. The industry expanded on the backs of African slaves, who became a significant proportion of the colonial population. The plantation economy gave rise to a distinctive social hierarchy based on race. The white plantation owners became an aristocracy linked to the merchants and Portuguese administrators. Artisans, small farmers, and free laborers were drawn from the ranks of people born of marriages between Indians, whites, and African slaves. At the bottom were the slaves, whose condition was marked both by race and servile status. Portugal eventually established a colonial government consisting of a governor general, though his control over the governors of the individual capitancies was limited. As in the Spanish colonies, the Catholic Church also established an important presence in Brazil. Intellectual life in Brazil lagged behind the Spanish colonies. Neither printing nor universities were established in the Portuguese colony.

C. Brazil’s Age of Gold

By the late 17th century, Caribbean colonies of other European nations challenged Brazil’s leadership in sugar production. As prices for sugar fell and slaves rose, the plantation economy of Brazil suffered. In 1695, explorers in the interior of Brazil discovered gold in the region of Minas Gerais. The discovery set off a gold rush of immigrants from Portugal. Because labor in the mines was also provided by African slaves, the African population of Minas Gerais also expanded rapidly. The Portuguese government moved to promote its interests in mining production through the establishment of administration and police. Mining stimulated the development of the colony’s interior, although the impact on Indian populations was typically disastrous. As in Spanish colonies, mining promoted, secondary production of food supplies. Rio de Janeiro, the city closest to the mines, grew in importance and replaced Salvador as the capital of Brazil in 1763. The mining regions adopted the hierarchy of color already apparent in the plantation zones. As gold exports paid for luxuries and manufactured goods, Brazil failed to develop an internal industrial capacity. When the gold mines began to peter out in the second half of the 17th century, Brazil and Portugal were economically dependent on England.

VI. Multiracial Societies

A. Introduction

The American colonies brought together three peoples--Indians, Africans, and Europeans--in a hierarchy created from conquest. Europeans were conquerors, thus superior. Other groups
were subject to various forms of European dominance—religious, social, political, and economic.

B. The Society of Castas

Spanish social hierarchies were complicated by intermarriage between races. Marriages between Spaniards and Indians resulted in the creation of a mixed race, the *mestizos*, who were regarded as socially superior to the Indians and more acculturated to European patterns. Similar patterns of social hierarchy resulted from Europeans sexual exploitation of African slaves in Brazil. In all of Latin America, social status reflected racial origins. Whites were the elite, blacks or Indians were at the bottom, and peoples of mixed race were in between. Together, people of mixed racial origin were referred to as the *castas*. Castas found that the higher offices and economic positions were closed to them. Despite social limitations, peoples of mixed race made up a large portion of Latin American populations. Social mobility might have resulted in changes in racial categorization, but being white was still the most obvious qualification for elite status. Even among whites, some distinctions were observed between those born in Europe, the *peninsulares*, and those born in the Americas, Creoles. Peninsulares, about whose racial origins there could be no doubt, were regarded as truly elite. Creoles rapidly developed a sense of identity separate from the European white population. Regardless of racial origin, households remained patriarchal. Women did have rights in dowry, inheritance, and some access to commerce.

VII. The Eighteenth-Century Reforms

A. Introduction

During the 18th century, the Latin American colonies revived on the basis of the expanded European economy and the increased demand for American goods. Movements for reform spread throughout Latin America.

B. The Shifting Balance of Politics and Trade

As Spain lost its dominance in Europe, France, England, and Holland threatened Spain’s monopoly over much of Latin America. Assaults on Spanish possessions began as raids and piracy, but in the mid-17th century, Spain’s rivals seized valuable islands in the Caribbean and converted them to plantation economies. Spanish control of trade with Latin America also suffered. Silver shipments declined, the colonies became more capable of supplying their own manufactured goods, and the local aristocracies who controlled the colonial governments were corrupt. When Charles II of Spain died without an heir in 1701, a French successor was named. Other European nations sought to prevent the diplomatic unification of France and Spain. The War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713) ended with the concession of Spain to the French Bourbon family but required that Spain partially open trade to Latin America to the British. Spain’s commercial monopoly was officially at an end.

C. The Bourbon Reforms

The Enlightened monarchy of the Bourbons undertook to reform both the internal and colonial governments of Spain. Groups that opposed reform, such as the Jesuits, were suppressed. Spanish trade to the New World was regularized and opened to Spanish ports other than Seville. In the colonies, the number of vicereguantes was increased with new regional governments in New Granada and the Rio de la Plata. Royal investigators exposed graft and
corruption in colonial administrations, resulting in the removal of many Creoles from the governments of Latin America. The French system of intendancies replaced the older local government. Reforms improved tax collection and economic development but offended many members of the colonial elite. Often allied with France against England in the later 18th century, Spain was forced to improve the military readiness of the colonies. Regular troops were sent and Creole militias were formed. Under military leadership, colonization of the frontiers in such places as California was renewed. The creation of monopolies was one of the major strategies for economic development introduced during the Bourbon reforms. Companies were granted exclusive rights in return for agreements to develop new regions of Latin America. Commerce within the Caribbean expanded under the terms of more open trade. Buenos Aires on the Rio de la Plata expanded rapidly. Opening Latin America to international trade weakened local manufacturing and created demands for a return to protectionism. Improvements in mining technology allowed the production of silver to improve, particularly in New Spain. The Bourbon reforms strengthened Spain’s empire at the expense of Creoles in the New World. Exclusion of Creoles from government and the increasingly dependent position of Latin America in world trade provoked resistance among the colonists.

D. Pombal and Brazil

The Bourbon reforms in Spain’s New World empire were paralleled by the Pombal reforms in Brazil. The Marquis of Pombal, Portugal’s prime minister, wished to free Portugal from its negative balance of trade with England. As in Spain, Pombal expelled the Jesuits, who resisted his plans for reform. Monopolies were created in Brazil, leading to the opening of new regions. Cotton and cacao plantations arose in the Amazon basin. In order to ensure a steady supply of slaves to Brazil, Pombal abolished slavery in Portugal. The colony continued to rely on African slaves as their primary labor source. Although Pombal’s reforms did reduce Portugal’s imbalance of trade with England, it could not revise Brazil’s position within the world trade system as a supplier of raw materials.

E. Reforms, Reactions, and Revolts

During the period of reform, the Latin American colonies experienced considerable growth in population and economic development. Despite evident prosperity, reforms disturbed social and political relations in the colonies and led to colonial resistance. Complaints against more aggressive government control led more frequently to rebellion after 1700. The Comunero Revolt in New Granada (1781) and the Tupac Amaru rebellion in Peru at about the same time produced real threats to colonial governments. In both cases, racial divisions among the revolutionaries allowed government forces to recover from initial defeats. Although there was a plot to overthrow the Brazilian government in 1788, it was discovered and thwarted before violence began. Only social and racial divisions prevented common action against colonial administrations in the later 18th century.

VIII. Global Connections: Latin American Civilization and the World Context

The creation of colonies in Latin America produced temporary benefits for the mother countries in terms of valuable imports and bullion. The culture of the Iberian peninsula was imposed on the Latin American colonies in the course of creating empires. Despite the cultural homogeneity implied in the term ‘Latin America,’ there were great variations from one region to the next in the Americas. Indian cultures continued to survive. In addition, the importation of large numbers of African slaves in some regions produced a hierarchic society
based on wealth, ethnicity, and race. Although the Latin American colonies produced products that remained in demand on the European markets, the New World economy was largely defined by outside control and dependence on a coercive labor system. Latin America was another of the dependent economic zones subject to dominance by Europeans in the global trade system. The Spanish and Portuguese empires, like the Russian, depended on gunpowder, but while Russia was selective in Westernization, Spain and Portugal attempted to fully impose Westernization on conquered people, with mixed results.

TIMELINE

*Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1498</th>
<th>1500</th>
<th>1533</th>
<th>1695</th>
<th>1713</th>
<th>1781</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bourbons recognized as rulers in Spain</td>
<td>Comunero, Tupac Amaru revolts begin</td>
<td>Cabral lands in Brazil</td>
<td>Treaty of Tordesillas issued</td>
<td>Pizarro conquers Cuzco</td>
<td>gold discovered in Brazil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

*The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.*

- *encomienda*
- *audiencia*
- Hernán Cortés
- Francisco Pizarro
- encomendero
- Huancavelica
- consulado
- letrados
- Paulistas
- sociedad de castas
- Josédé Galvez
- Caribbean
- Casa de Contratación
- Mexico City
- Pedro de Valdivia
- Potosí
- haciendas
- galleons
- Recopilación
- Minas Gerais
- peninsulares
- Marquís of Pombal
- Tupac Amaru
- Hispaniola
- Bartolomé de Las Casas
- New Spain
- Francisco Vázquez de Coronado
- mita
- Comunero revolt
- Treaty of Tordesillas
- capitancies
- Rio de Janeiro
- Creoles
- War of the Spanish Succession
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. What aspects of Iberian society were transferred to the New World colonies?
2. What model for American colonization was established in the Caribbean?
3. What was the nature of the exploitation of Indians in the Americas?
4. Discuss the economy of the American colonies.
5. Discuss the nature of Spanish administration in the American colonies.
6. How did the discovery of gold change the economic organization of Brazil?
7. Describe the social hierarchy of the American colonies.
8. What was the nature of the 18th-century reforms in the Portuguese and Spanish colonies? Why did they provoke colonial resistance?
9. Compare the development of the Spanish and Portuguese Empires with that of Russia.

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.

1. How can it be said that the Spanish and Portuguese colonies were extensions of the global commercial network of the West? What was the intermediary role of the Iberian nations? Hint: What was the final destination of bullion exported from the New World?
2. How was the social organization of the Americas different from that of Europe? In what way did the differences in social hierarchy contribute to a sense of self-identity in the colonies? How was the incorporation of different ethnic groups in Latin America different than the inclusion of other peoples in China?
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. Which of the following is NOT characteristic of Iberian society?
   a. heavy urbanization
   b. the absence of slaveholding traditions
   c. emphasis on nobility
   d. emphasis on patriarchal ideals

2. What was the **encomienda**?
   a. grants of Indians to individual Spaniards in a form of serfdom
   b. the local administrative unit of the Latin American colonies
   c. agricultural settlements in Peru
   d. the legal code imposed on the Spanish colonies

3. Which of the following statements concerning the Spanish colonies during the 16th century is most accurate?
   a. Trade to the Spanish colonies was entirely within the hands of English merchants.
   b. Trade to the American colonies was limited to Spanish merchants, but otherwise unrestricted.
   c. The self-sufficiency of the colonies meant that there was little commerce between Europe and Latin America.
   d. Trade to the American colonies was managed by the Board of Trade, which funneled all commerce through Seville and Cadiz.

4. The tremendous decline of the Indian population was matched by the rapid increase in
   a. technological development.
   b. European livestock.
   c. Spanish women.
   d. imports of cotton cloth.

5. When the **encomienda** system began to fail, the Spanish government
   a. responded by creating a free labor system.
   b. began to rely on Indian labor extracted through local officials, a practice called the **mita**.
   c. permitted the enslavement of the Indian population.
   d. enforced its continuation by the passage of a series of restrictive laws.

6. Which of the following statements concerning the agricultural system of Latin America is NOT accurate?
   a. Colonists faced with declining Indian populations found landownership more attractive.
   b. In places where large sedentary populations existed, Indian communal agriculture of traditional crops continued.
   c. Plantation crops like sugar and later cacao were exported to Europe in sufficient quantities to exceed the value of bullion exported.
   d. Spanish America retained a predominantly agrarian economy.
7. In 1494, Spain and Portugal clarified the boundaries of their colonial possessions in the
   a. Treaty of Tordesillas.
   c. Treaty of Utrecht.
   d. Treaty of Westphalia.

8. By 1700, slaves comprised approximately what proportion of the Brazilian population?
   a. one-fourth
   b. one-third
   c. one-half
   d. two-thirds

9. Which of the following statements concerning the Brazilian economy is most accurate?
   a. The Brazilian model of estate agriculture based on slave labor could not be successfully
ten duplicated elsewhere in the Americas.
   b. The demographic decline of the Indian population eventually made the production of sugar
   incompossible, and estate agriculture in Brazil disappeared.
   c. Competition from English, French, and Dutch plantations in the Caribbean undercut the
   Brazilian sugar industry.
   d. Because Brazil never developed a mining economy, sugar remained its most lucrative export.

10. Which of the following statements concerning the 18th-century Spanish reforms in America is
    most accurate?
    a. The English system of justices of the peace was introduced to replace the audiencias.
    b. The Spanish colonies were largely demilitarized.
    c. The French intendancy system was introduced.
    d. The Spanish reforms did little to alter the patterns of local administration.