



COLONIAL CRUCIBLE

Rule by Spain and Portugal lasted three long centuries in Latin America. Despite the utopian dreams of the religiously inspired and despite continual resistance to exploitation, the bitter legacy of conquest and slavery remained strong in 1800, the eve of independence. Latin Americans had wrestled with the hierarchy of race imposed by conquest and slavery and had adapted themselves to that hierarchy. As Latin American societies grew around the hard edges of domination like the roots of a tree gradually embracing the rocks at its base, adaptation made colonization endurable but also embedded it in people's habits. Indigenous, African, and European people consorted and intermingled, fought and slept together. They misunderstood and learned about, despised, and sometimes adored each other. Over hundreds of years, most Latin Americans began to sincerely accept Catholicism and the rule of a Spanish or Portuguese king. Thus, more than merely rule by outsiders, colonization

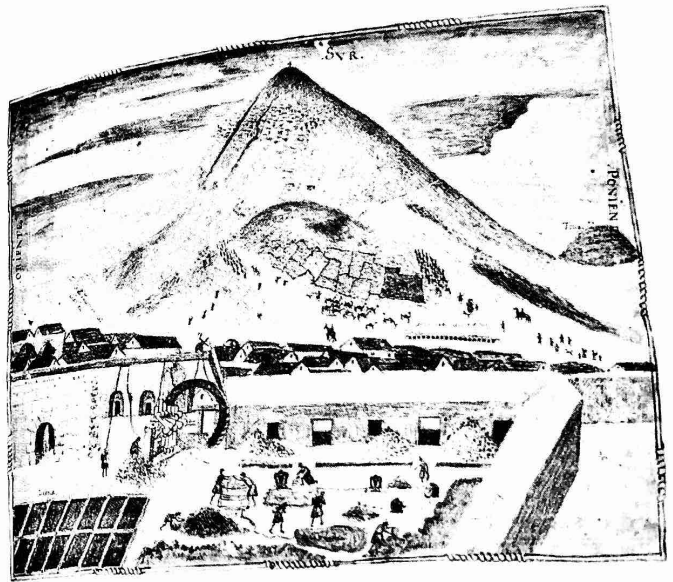
was a social and cultural, even a psychological process. The resulting patterns of domination—intricate and omnipresent—constitute the saddest product of the colonial crucible.

The contours of colonial Latin American societies revealed the priorities of the Iberian invaders. A whirlwind tour of the colonies will explain the basic economic patterns and geographical layout. To begin, only precious metals and a few high-priced items such as sugar (then a luxury) could repay the enormous costs of transportation across the Atlantic Ocean. So mines and sugar plantations loom large in the early history of Latin America.

COLONIAL ECONOMICS

Silver and sugar shaped the emerging colonial economies. Gold was the precious metal that first mesmerized the Europeans, however—gold from Aztec and Inca treasures, gold that could easily be panned in sandy streambeds and was quickly exhausted. An early Caribbean gold rush had helped annihilate the Arawaks during the first generation of Spanish colonization. But silver, not gold, eventually structured the colonial economy of Spanish America. The major silver mines of Zacatecas (Mexico) and Potosí (Peru) were opened in the 1540s. Zacatecas, an area without sedentary inhabitants, attracted indigenous migrants from central Mexico. Migrants also became miners at Potosí, on a windswept mountain plateau at twelve thousand feet, where Spanish smelting techniques (using a bellows) did not work and indigenous ones (channeling the Andean wind) had to be adopted instead. These were deep-shaft mines that went miles under the earth, vast quasi-industrial enterprises that attracted diverse assortments of people. Mining immediately began to reshape Mexican and Peruvian society.

The mining zones became the great focus of Spanish activity in America, linking the colonies economically with Europe. For a while in the 1600s, Potosí became the most populous city in America. And because Potosí stood more or less on the roof of the world, too high for agriculture, almost everything except silver had to be



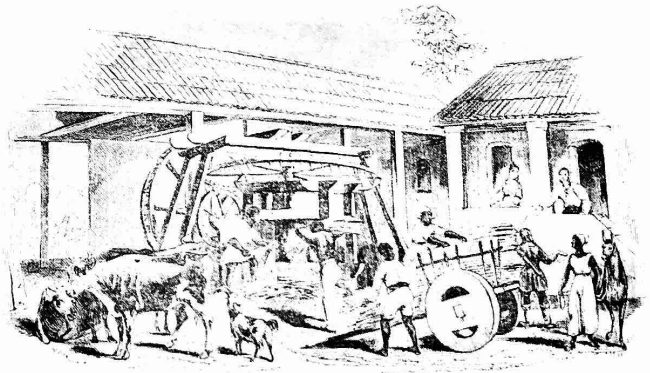
POTOSÍ. Honeycombed with mine shafts, the "mountain of silver" looms over the city of Potosí in modern Bolivia—called Upper Peru at the time of this 1584 painting. In the foreground, silver ore is being crushed by water-powered machinery and mixed with mercury to extract the precious metal. *The Granger Collection, New York.*

brought to it by mules. Sure-footed mules, bred on the plains of Argentina, trooped up narrow Andean trails to provide transportation. Indigenous women elsewhere in the Andes wove cloth to dress the miners, and farmers at lower altitudes sent food to feed them. (To apply economic concepts here, "primary" export production stimulated "secondary" supply activities.) Eventually, silver came down from the sky on mules bound for the coast. Because the high plateau of the central Andes is so remote from the coast, the Peruvian capital was established at Lima, near a good seaport. Likewise, the wealth of colonial Mexico clustered along routes connecting the northern mines with Mexico City and the port of Veracruz. The northern mining zones became a meeting place for all

sorts of people, while southern Mexico, along with Guatemala, had a more strictly indigenous population. The main ethnicities in this southern region were Zapotec, Mixtec, and especially Maya—the people among whom Malinche grew up. Now all of southern Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean became part of the supply network for the northern silver mines.

The economic priorities of the Spanish Crown determined the political organization of the colony. The “royal fifth,” a 20 percent tax on mining, was the prime source of colonial revenue for the Spanish state. To keep an eye on the royal fifth, the Crown organized colonial governments in New Spain (the colonial name for Mexico, administratively embracing Central America and the Caribbean as well) and Peru (which then included much of South America), by the late 1540s. Each of these areas, called *viceroyalties* because of the *viceroy*s sent from Spain to rule in the king’s name, also had an archbishop and a high court. Eventually, Mexico City and Lima each developed a wholesale merchants’ guild that concentrated commercial power, as well as political power, in the *viceregal* capitals. Gradually, the *viceroyalties*, high courts, and other administrative subdivisions multiplied in a manner guided by the principle of profitability to the Crown. Modern Colombia became the center of a third *viceroyalty* (called New Granada, 1717) partly because of its gold. Eventually, another jurisdiction was created to stop Potosí silver from escaping untaxed through the area of modern Argentina. This became the fourth *viceroyalty* (the Río de la Plata, 1776), with its capital at the Atlantic port of Buenos Aires. Despite the two new *viceroyalties*, however, Peru and Mexico remained the core areas of Spanish colonization.

In Brazil, sugar took the place of silver, and plantations replaced mines as the main generators of export production. Sugar plantations capitalized on rich red soils, superb for the cultivation of sugarcane, along Brazil’s northeastern coast. The Northeast therefore became the core area of the Brazilian colony, with its principal centers in Pernambuco and the Bay of All Saints. For the Portuguese Crown, the taxes on exported sugar—and on goods imported with



A BRAZILIAN SUGAR MILL. In this nineteenth-century engraving, sugarcane is being unloaded from an oxcart and fed into an *engenho*’s grinding mechanism, producing gallons of sweet sap that will be boiled down into bricks of sugar for shipment. The *senhor de engenho* looks on. *The Granger Collection, New York.*

profits from sugar—were the prime sources of colonial revenue in Brazil. Throughout the 1600s, sugar was king in Brazil, and it structured the Brazilian colony much as silver mining structured colonial Spanish America.

Sugarcane had to be milled and its juice boiled down into cakes in order to be exported. Planters rich enough to build a sugar mill (an *engenho*, or “engine” in Portuguese) became known as “mill lords,” *senhores de engenho*. The *senhores de engenho* stood at the crux of the sugar economy, and they loom large in Brazilian social history. In each locality of the Brazilian sugar coast, a handful of mill lords, each owning hundreds of slaves, lorded over their neighbors, many of whom grew sugarcane but depended on the lords to have it milled. Like a silver mine, a big *engenho* was a complex and expensive economic undertaking, almost a town in itself, with a chapel, stables, storage facilities, and workshops, not to mention barracks-like slave quarters. As in the early plantation colonies of North America’s Chesapeake

Bay, plantations that were almost towns in themselves tended to undercut the growth of urban centers. The Brazilian colony, even its core area, was a place of few cities and towns when compared with colonial Spanish America.

Outside of its northeastern core area, most of colonial Brazil was quite sparsely settled. The Amazonian northwest, for example, remained a vast equatorial rain forest inhabited chiefly by semisedentary indigenous tribes, half a continent with a mere handful of tiny Portuguese towns and a sprinkling of Jesuit missions along the banks of its river highways. The backlands behind the sugar coast, the sertão, stayed dirt-poor cattle country. Other interior regions could be reached only by thousand-mile canoe odysseys involving arduous portages between rivers, feasible only during the rainy season. The Portuguese called these rainy-season canoe expeditions "monsoons," a word they had learned in India. South of São Paulo lay more Jesuit missions in evergreen forests outside the tropics. And beyond these forests, open grasslands stretched south to the Río de la Plata. Here, cattle and horses that had escaped from the missions ran wild, multiplied, and roamed free in numberless herds.

Overall, colonial Brazil could not compete with colonial Spanish America. Sugar was never as precious as silver. Only slowly did Brazil become the principal focus of the Portuguese seaborne empire, with its rich African and Asian outposts. So the Brazilian colony remained in all ways less: poorer, less populous (with a tenth the people of Spanish America), and more loosely governed. Brazil's diffuse plantation economy limited urbanization and scattered administrative power. Two viceroyalties were eventually established, but only during wartime did Brazilian viceroys possess the authority of Spanish American viceroys. Portugal simply attempted less in its colonies than did Spain. For example, there were a dozen universities in Spanish America after barely a century of colonization, but none was ever established in colonial Brazil. One might wonder how Brazil stayed a Portuguese colony for three hundred years.

A POWER CALLED HEGEMONY

Both the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns had limited resources for colonization. Neither had large military forces in the American colonies. Iberian colonizers and their American-born descendants were a small minority even in the core areas, so how did they maintain control over so much of the hemisphere for three centuries?

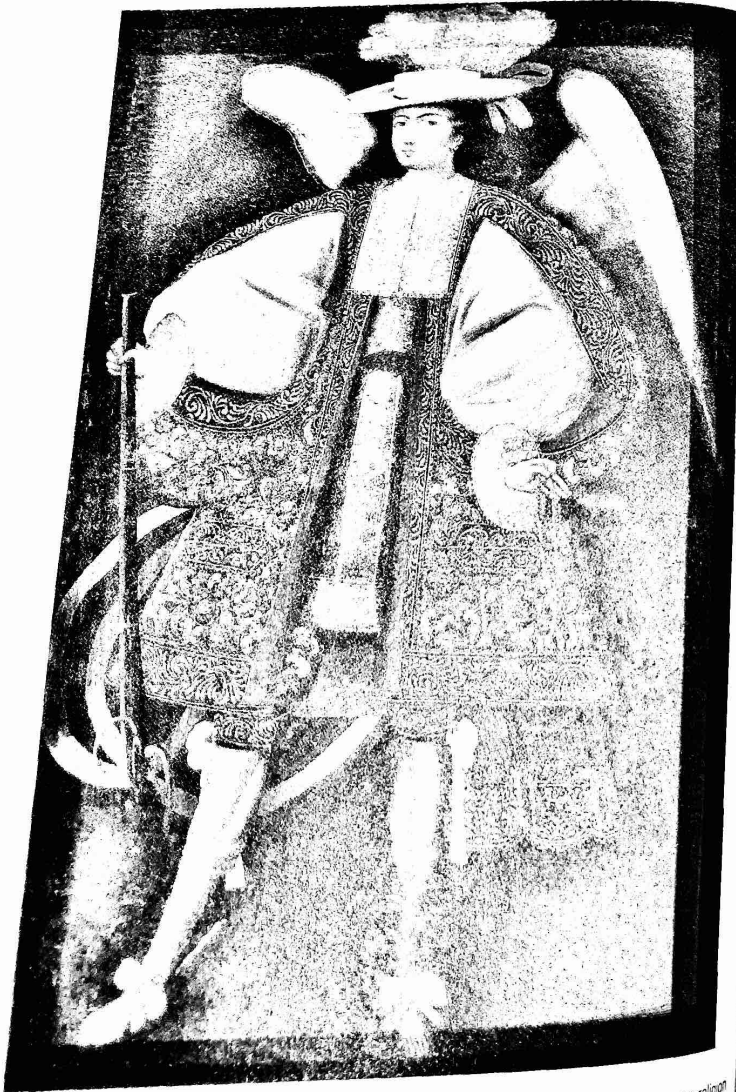
To answer that question, consider the life of Sor (Sister) Juana Inés de la Cruz, a Mexican nun who died in 1695. At the age of seven, Juana had made a surprising announcement. She wanted to attend the University of Mexico (which had opened its doors in 1553, a century before Harvard). She offered to dress as a boy, but it was hopeless. A university education was supposedly over Juana's head. Never mind that she had been reading since the age of three or that she learned Latin just for fun. Forget that she stumped a jury of forty university professors at the age of seventeen, or that Juana became known throughout Mexico for her poetry. Like other women of her class, she had two alternatives: marry and devote her energies to husband and children, or become a nun. Juana chose convent life, which offered a little more independence than marriage. She became Sor Juana, as she is known to history. She collected and read books by the hundreds, studied mathematics, composed and performed music, and even invented a system of musical notation. Her poetry was published in Europe. Some of it criticized hypocritical male condemnations of women's sexual morality: "Why do you wish them to do right / If you encourage them to do wrong?" asked one poem. And, concerning the common scorn for prostitutes, she wondered who really sinned more: "She who sins for pay / Or he who pays for sin?" In the kitchen, she dabbled in experimental science. "Aristotle would have written more," she said, "if he had done any cooking." When she published a brilliant reply to one of her century's most celebrated biblical scholars, the fathers of the church became worried. Juana received instructions to act more like a woman. Her scientific interests, they said—and all her other interests, too, except for religious devotion—were unnatural in a woman. This was the wisdom of her age. She could not defy

it alone, and ultimately, she consented. She sold her library, instruments, everything, and devoted herself to atonement for the sin of curiosity. Broken, she confessed to being "the worst of women." Soon after, she died while caring for her sisters during a plague.

The fathers of the church never used physical force against Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. They did not have to. They embodied religious authority, and she was a religious woman. Revolt or disobedience was literally unthinkable for her. Similarly, the conquered indigenous people of Latin America, and the enslaved Africans, too, gradually accepted the basic premises of colonial life and principles of Iberian authority. Otherwise, Spain and Portugal could never have ruled vast expanses of America without powerful occupying armies.

Historians explain colonial control of Latin America as *hegemony*, a kind of domination that implies a measure of consent by those at the bottom. Hegemony contrasts with control by violent force. It is a steady preponderance rather than an iron rule. Though it may seem "soft," this form of political power is resilient and does devastating damage to people at the bottom. When they accept the principle of their own inferiority and, in the old-fashioned phrase, "know their place," they participate in their own subjugation.

Religion offers one of the clearest examples of cultural hegemony. When enslaved Africans and indigenous people accepted the Europeans' "true religion," they accepted, by the same token, their own status as newcomers to the truth. Catholicism, after all, had been born and developed far from indigenous America. The history of the "true church" was a European history, and its earthly capital was Rome. Most priests and nuns, not to mention bishops and the rest of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, were of European descent. The monarchs of Spain and Portugal reigned by a divine right that only heretics would question, and they enjoyed royal patronage rights, allowing them to appoint or dismiss priests and bishops almost as if they were Crown officials. The royal government decided where churches should be built and collected the *tithe* (an ecclesiastical tax of 10 percent, paid especially on agricultural products). To sin against Catholic teachings was, in many cases, a criminal offense.



PAINTINGS OF ARMED ANGELS illustrate the close relationship between religion and authority in the eighteenth-century Andes. Their clothing evoked social rank; their muskets, military power; and their wings, the endorsement of heaven. DEA/M. Seemüller/De Agostini/Getty Images

All educational institutions were religious, so if knowledge is power (and it is), the church monopolized that power. The Inquisition kept a list of banned books that people were not allowed to read. The church even controlled time; the tolling of bells set the rhythm of the day, signaling the hours of work, rest, and prayer. Successive Sundays marked the seven-day week, which was new to indigenous people. The Catholic calendar of observances and holidays provided milestones through the year: a collective, public ebb and flow of emotions, from celebration at Epiphany and Carnival, for example, to the somber mood of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. The milestones of individual lives, from baptism to marriage to death, were validated by church sacraments and registered in church records. Place names, too, were frequently religious. Every town and city had an official patron saint, often part of the city's full name—São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco de Quito, and so on.

Another hegemonic force, omnipresent and inescapable, was *patriarchy*, the general principle that fathers rule. Fathers ruled heaven and earth, cities and families. The Spanish and Portuguese were more rigidly patriarchal than many indigenous American and African societies, so the hegemony of fathers must be understood, at least in part, as a legacy of colonialism. Patriarchy structured all colonial institutions, including the exclusively male hierarchy of the church, right up to the Holy Father in Rome. Iberian law was based on patriarchal principles. Husbands had legal control over their wives as over their children. Wealthy women led shut-in, elaborately chaperoned lives, isolated from all male contact outside the family—a matter of *honor* in traditional Spanish and Portuguese sexual ethics.

Honor was a measure of how well men and women played their prescribed, and very different, social roles. Avoiding extramarital sex, in this way of thinking, became something like a woman's supreme life mission, whereas a man's sexual purity held less value. In practice, if a man could support more than one woman, that heightened his social distinction, so many men kept mistresses. On the other hand, men were supposed to defend—specifically by bloodshed—the virginity of their daughters and the sexual exclusivity

of their wives. This conception of honor led to dueling and to the violent punishment of independent-minded women. This cultural pattern has pre-Christian roots in the Mediterranean world and a basic logic, worth mentioning to show the rhyme and reason in this madness, that relates to property. Women's illegitimate children, not men's, would be born into the family and inherit part of its precious patrimony: the family wealth parceled out among heirs at the death of each parent. Male "wild oats," on the other hand, would sprout on somebody else's property, so to speak. Thus male philandering implied no loss, but rather a kind of territorial gain, for the family.

Women resisted being treated like means rather than ends, of course. Fairly often, it seems, they used magic—coming from the folk traditions of Iberia, as well as Africa and indigenous America—to attract, manipulate, escape, or punish men. The Spanish Inquisition was on the alert against them. In 1592 the Inquisition punished a poor Lima woman for reciting a prayer under her breath "so that men would desire her." That was European folk magic, meant to redirect the powers of Catholic liturgy by saying a prayer backward, for example. Inquisition files of the 1600s also reveal native Andean "witches" like Catalina Guacayllano, accused of spilling the blood of guinea pigs on sacred rocks while chewing coca and praying "Oh Lord Father who has been burned, who gives us the irrigation canals and water, give me food." Her idea of God seems to have remained strongly indigenous, giving her, and her people, a spiritual independence from Spanish religion. In explaining why he had three women whipped, a Peruvian priest reported that these witches "went neither to Mass nor to catechism class." Instead, they publicly disobeyed him and inspired their whole village to do the same.

Two centuries later, in 1763, and thousands of miles away, in Grão Pará, at the mouth of the Amazon River, the Portuguese Inquisition collected evidence about various sorts of nonapproved cures—involving smoke, incantations, potions, talismans, shaking walls, medicine bundles, and disembodied voices—that it regarded as witchcraft. But the inquisition's witchcraft was mostly Amazonian

or African religion. (European medicine of the time, recall, focused on bleeding the patient. Besides, there were few European-style "leeches" to be hired in Grão Pará.) These indigenous or African witches were being called in by respectable white people desperate for a cure, and they were paid for their work. In one case, the accused witches were white widows who had apparently learned indigenous traditions and also, according to their accuser, consorted with indigenous men.

Women doubtless got less satisfaction than men out of the colonial Latin American "honor system," which cast suspicion on any woman who did not live under male control, especially widows. Learning to live with these values, for there was no other choice, women absorbed them. Only women of property could make the grade, though, because people without property lacked honor almost by definition. Poor women often had to work outside their homes, after all, as cooks, laundresses, or market women who moved around by themselves in the street as no honorable lady would. Not all roles were honorable, no matter how well played. Slaves, who were themselves somebody else's property, had no hope of honor. Only the most extraordinary slave, like Henrique Dias, a born fighter who led Brazilian forces against Dutch invaders in the 1600s, could achieve it. The women of indigenous communities, whose social life retained different gender patterns, lived less in the grip of this unfortunate honor system.

In sum, cultural hegemony made dominance seem natural and inevitable to the people being dominated. That was its awesome power. Indigenous and African people eventually accepted Iberian kings as their natural rulers by divine right. However, a situation comes to seem the natural "way of the world" only after considerable give-and-take. The less powerful accept ongoing subjugation only after making the best possible bargain with those more powerful. Thus, women accepted patriarchal subjugation but demanded in return that men live up to their responsibilities as good providers and strong protectors. Similarly, when indigenous people and Africans became Catholics, they conceded religious authority in return for a protected status as Christians. Fortunately, there was another, more

positive outcome of all of this. Along with hegemonic dominance, daily give-and-take created distinctive, new Latin American cultures through *transculturation*.

A PROCESS CALLED TRANSCULTURATION

The influential Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz first applied the term *transculturation* to Cuba's popular music and dance traditions. *Transculturation*, a two-way street, contrasts with *acculturation*, which is a one-way street in which one culture replaces another. Ortiz's point was that the dominated cultures of Africans and indigenous people were *not* wiped away, in Latin America, to be replaced by European cultures. Instead, something new resulted from the give-and-take, something not European, not indigenous, not African, but rather, something distinctively Cuban, mixed by definition. Like hegemony, *transculturation* has become a key concept in Latin American Studies. Historians now believe that *transculturation* lies at the origin of Latin America's national cultures.

Imagine *transculturative* give-and-take as a thousand tiny confrontations and tacit negotiations taking place in people's daily lives, always within the force field of hierarchy and domination. Music is needed for the procession, say, or to celebrate the arrival of a new viceroy. Will the slaves be allowed to dance and play their own instruments? That certainly would add to the festivities, at some cost to European dignity, however. The singing of black women in church choirs began to infuse Cuban music with African sensibility as early as the 1580s, but not without resistance. Here we can see that *transculturation* and hegemony are two sides of the same coin, one positive, the other negative. Cuba's shared musical and dance culture became, famously, a harmonious marriage of Spanish guitar and African drum. That's *transculturation* in action. The descendants of slaves accepted a subordinate place in Cuban society, excelling as musicians and sports figures only. That's cultural hegemony in action. The descendants of slave owners

accepted African cultural influences as part of a package deal that benefited them, overall. The people on top, in Latin America's colonial crucible, were always able to remain on top, and they were usually able to impose the broad outlines and basic content of the new cultural forms.

The people below contributed more subtle elements of style, rhythm, texture, and mood. Although European forms structured the outer contours of collective life even among indigenous people and slaves, the inner dimensions resisted colonial standardization. Slaves, who gathered and danced on religious feast days, preserved African religion by dressing it in the clothes of Catholic saints, so to speak. A blending of indigenous, African, and European religious attitudes often occurred. The blend might be covert, as when indigenous artists integrated their own sacred plant and animal motifs (and in the Andes, symbolic rainbows) into the mural paintings of Catholic cloisters, but they could be more obvious. The Virgin of Guadalupe, for example, supposedly first appeared on a site already sacred in Aztec times. When an indigenous boy reported seeing the miraculous appearance, the Spanish ecclesiastical authorities were wary of an "Indian virgin" with a dark face, whom Nahuatl-speaking Mexicans continued to call *Tonantzin*, the name of an indigenous earth goddess. Gradually, though, they accepted her and made her the patron saint of Mexico. As a result, the Nahuas got to see Spaniards kneel before *Tonantzin* (dress her however you like), and the Spanish religion got a whole new level of indigenous buy-in. Thus did indigenous and African religions infiltrate Latin American Catholicism. The profusion of blood on colonial Mexican crucifixion figures, for example, was meant to evoke blood's life-giving power, a prominent element of Aztec religion. In the Caribbean and Brazil, on the other hand, Catholicism acquired a less austere, more celebratory and African tone. In Salvador, on Brazil's Day of All Saints, an African religious spirit, including dancing to very un-European rhythms, infused many Catholic ceremonies during the 1700s.

Here we need to say a few words about colonial cities, which provided a special setting for *transculturation*. The Spanish and



THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE, Mexico's patron saint, has both European and indigenous precedents and has played a unifying role in Mexico since colonial days. © Leemage/Cortis

A PROCESS CALLED TRANSCULTURATION

Portuguese were tiny minorities in colonial Latin America. They quickly founded and crowded into a scattering of small cities with populations of only a few thousand each. In many ways, these were tiny islands of European-style life and architecture dotting the vastness of indigenous America. Still, cities were the staging centers and command centers of the colonial project.

The hegemonic institutions of colonial governance existed only in cities. All administrative officials, bishops, judges, notaries, merchants, and moneylenders—the people whose commands, reports, and dealings with one another connected cities to Europe—were urban based. Cities organized the great public spectacles that dramatized imperial power: solemn processions for Holy Week (preceding Easter), ceremonial welcomes for new viceroys, boisterous celebrations to commemorate royal marriages. Immense churches and convents, viceroys who could literally “grant honors,” and refined European ladies and gentlemen who provided models of “superior” behavior made cities impressive. In Spanish America, cities were laid out according to imperial directives mandating the now familiar but then innovative checkerboard of square blocks and streets that intersect at right angles. Around the central square of each city stood the governor's palace, the cathedral, and mansions for the bishop and richest families, also the seat of the city council, which was the most important governing institution outside the handful of major capitals. Urban centers were given the legal rank of village, town, or city, each under the jurisdiction of higher-ranked centers nearby, all reporting to the handful of major capitals such as Lima, Mexico City, Bogotá, and Buenos Aires. The Portuguese gave less emphasis to the creation of model cities in Brazil, partly because their principal export product, sugar, was agricultural. Still, cities were the only places in Spanish America or Brazil where white people could socialize mostly with each other, places where a tiny minority could maintain a basically European culture.

The attempt to recreate Spain or Portugal in colonial cities ultimately failed. Many indigenous and mestizo people, as well as blacks, both free and enslaved, became city dwellers. From the very



A GUAMAN POMA DRAWING denounces Spanish exploitation in the early 1600s. Here, a royal administrator, a parish priest, a notary, and other representatives of Spanish power (portrayed as savage beasts) menace a kneeling Indian. Werner Forman/Art Resource, New York.

beginning, the impact of colonization had shaken some indigenous people loose from their native communities and forced them to migrate. Some went to the mines or Spanish estates. Some built simple housing on the outskirts of colonial cities—Latin America's first suburban shantytowns. Torn away from their cultural roots, indigenous migrants had to regrow them in new environments, as did those other forced migrants, enslaved Africans. Urban slaves enjoyed greater freedom of association than did plantation slaves. Urban slaves could locate and socialize with people from the same part of Africa. Urban slaves could also join free black people in Catholic lay brotherhoods that provided a social support group and a sense of voluntary belonging. Slaves, and free blacks too, often worked as artisans (bakers or carpenters, for instance), and artisans came in all colors. As mestizos, free blacks, and poor whites rubbed elbows at a shoemaker's bench or in a blacksmith's shop, they were inventing Latin American popular culture.

Outside the cities, people of European descent were few and colonial institutions, almost non-existent. Native and African cultures dominated life in the countryside by simple demographic weight. The white people of the countryside were too few and far between to socialize, or marry, exclusively with each other. Rural people of Spanish and Portuguese descent, even when they maintained a house in town, thus acquired indigenous habits and African tastes sooner than did their urban counterparts. If transculturation happened on profitable Brazilian sugar plantations, where export earnings could pay for imported clothing, wine, and even food, it happened even more on haciendas, the less profitable sort of large estate more typical of Spanish America. Rather than investing huge sums in an enslaved workforce, haciendas relied on indigenous workers, who earned a small salary or shared the harvest. Instead of crops for export to Europe, haciendas produced for local consumption. And as a rule, hacienda owners who had little to sell to Europe could afford few imported European goods. On rare visits to town, their speech, clothing, and behavior seemed (from the point of view of their urban cousins) rustically tinged with indigenous or African influences.

The indigenous and African-descended people of the countryside preserved more of their own cultures than did their city cousins. Accepting indigenous and African cultural influences in church festivities became habitual among missionaries trying to attract indigenous people to Christianity. Rural indigenous people, when compared with those in the city, had more chance to live apart, in their own villages, speaking Quechua or Quiché or Aymara or Nahuatl and following their own traditions. Plantation slaves worked in gangs, associating mostly with each other, and were often locked down at night. Urban slaves became fluent in Portuguese much more quickly than their country cousins. This is why the countryside of colonial Latin America seemed so exotic to European travelers. They dismissed the cities as second-rate imitations of Europe, while the countryside was a world apart, not Spanish or Portuguese, not indigenous or African, but a fusion of various elements, varying from region to region in kaleidoscopic combinations.

For Latin America's subjugated majorities, transculturation was both a blessing and a curse. Colonial masters and servants became a bit more like each other, seemingly a positive result. But by refashioning Spanish or Portuguese culture in their own likeness, the subjugated more easily consented to the basic ideology of colonization and, therefore, moved more firmly under colonial control. El Inca Garcilaso and Guamán Poma, two spokesmen for the native people of Peru, wrote books advancing some indigenous perspectives, but they did so while strongly endorsing Christianity and Spanish rule. The Jesuit Antônio Vieira, who has been called the Las Casas of Brazil, exemplifies the same paradox. Vieira was one of the most famous intellectuals of the 1600s. In fact, it was a polemical publication by Vieira that Sor Juana made the mistake of refuting too brilliantly for her own good. Vieira traveled back and forth between Brazil and Portugal preaching fiery sermons. He studied both Tupi and the language of Angola. He tried to protect the indigenous people against the Portuguese settlers. He defended the humanity and worth of African slaves. Vieira preached that "Brazil has its body in America and its soul in Angola," but he also called on slaves to endure slavery with a good

heart and await their reward in the Christian heaven. Vieira had some African heritage of his own, through his grandmother; slaves who heard him preach no doubt found him more convincing for that reason.

THE FRINGES OF COLONIZATION

While the colonizers concentrated their efforts on silver mining and sugar cultivation, vast reaches of Spanish America and Brazil remained outside the core areas, on the "fringe" of colonization. The fringes were quite different from the core areas because they had little to export. They could not generate as much wealth for Iberian colonizers and therefore attracted fewer of them. Lack of sugar and precious metals meant less incentive to force labor from indigenous people, less capital to invest in African slaves, and, overall, fewer stark contrasts between luxury and misery. A weaker money economy meant that people's energy went into subsistence activities, especially growing their own food. Where people are few, those at the bottom of the social hierarchy become more important. Thus people of mixed race got a little more respect in fringe areas, and even slaves received better treatment there, because their replacement price was harder to afford.

Paraguay, a large Spanish province in the heart of the South American continent, was one of the most socially peripheral areas in the empire. Like many fringe areas, Paraguay had a form of colonization characterized by missions where religious orders, the Jesuits in this case, gathered indigenous people to be instructed in the Christian faith. Remote from the mining economy and almost landlocked, colonial Paraguay became thoroughly permeated with Guaraní indigenous influence. Eventually, Guaraní became the language of intimate conversation at all levels of Paraguayan society, even among nonindigenous people. Racial mixing, another characteristic of fringe societies, made Paraguay notably mestizo. Even Paraguay's chief export was native American—leaves of the evergreen *yerba mate* tree, which made a tea widely consumed in South America.

Farther south, at the mouth of the Río de la Plata, lay other Spanish American settlements, including the ports of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, much less isolated than Paraguay, but still fringes. The great rivers that feed the Río de la Plata together constitute a navigable transportation network second in Latin America only to the Amazon. Silver from Potosí flowed out of the continent here—hence Río de la Plata, or River of Silver. Herds of cattle multiplied on the grasslands around the Río de la Plata, and by late in the colonial period, the exportation of cattle hides added yet another lucrative line to this rising Spanish American fringe. Still, even after becoming the capital of a new viceroyalty in 1776, Buenos Aires could hardly compete with the splendors, refinements, and impressive buildings of Mexico City or Lima. Mobile parties of indigenous raiders still swooped down on isolated ranch houses and carried away captives to be incorporated into tribal life not so far south of the city. On the other hand, the society of the Río de la Plata could boast a kind of abundance different from that of the older colonial centers. The ratio of cattle to people was so high that virtually everyone, including slaves, ate as much beef as they wanted. Horses, too, abounded; to the astonishment of Europeans, Argentine paupers might beg from horseback.

Across the Andes from Argentina lay another Spanish fringe settlement, Chile, paradoxically isolated despite its two thousand miles of Pacific coast. To channel resources to mining, the Spanish Crown had made Chile strictly subordinate to the viceroyalty of Peru. In addition, to curb smuggling and defend the sea link between America and Europe, the Crown restricted transatlantic communications to one annual fleet that gathered at Havana bound for Spain, and another that made the return trip. As a result, Chile's only communications with Madrid involved first a voyage to Lima, then a second leg to Panama, a harrowing journey on mule over the forest-clad mountains of the isthmus, a third voyage through the pirate-infested Caribbean, a layover in Havana, and then the perilous Atlantic crossing. Nor could Chile offer settlers many tribute-paying indigenous servants. Indeed, the southern Chilean frontier had resisted colonization even before the Spanish arrived. Then

Inca armies had encountered the unconquerable Araucanos, whose heads Inés Suárez famously cut off. Fighting between the Spanish and the Araucanos continued for centuries. By the 1700s, however, the Spanish controlled most of Chile, with its long central valley lying between the towering Andean ridges and the Pacific. This valley was fertile but lay outside the tropics, too far south for sugar. Instead, Chilean landowners grew wheat as part of the supply network of the Peruvian mining complex.

Spanish fringe areas were often cattle frontiers, sparsely populated lands of "cowboys and Indians," dotted with isolated mission settlements. Río de la Plata cowboys were called *gauchos*, Chilean ones *guasos*, Mexican ones *vaqueros*, and so on. In fact, the cattle lands of the southwestern United States were once a fringe of the Mexican mining zone. In later years, the Anglo settlers learned to be cowboys from the "buckaroos" (*vaqueros*, that is) who preceded them. Spanish American fringes, in other words, were a bit like the Wild West. These cattle frontiers remained poor as long as beef could be preserved only by drying it into jerky, which people in Europe refused to eat.

Much of the Caribbean region, where Columbus touched land, was a fringe area after the first decades of colonization. Cuba, the greatest of the Antilles, comprising roughly half the total land area of all the Caribbean islands, was basically cattle country until the late 1700s. The islands of Hispaniola and Jamaica remained so undeveloped that the French and English made their own territorial claims there. Likewise, on the southern shore of the Caribbean, most of Venezuela was a cattle frontier too. The Caribbean coast of Central America was another sparsely colonized fringe, which explains how the English got footholds there, especially the foothold that became Belize—an English-speaking, non-Latin American country wedged between Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras.

New Granada (present-day Colombia) was, then as now, a place more complicated than most. It had dense populations of fully sedentary indigenous people in its Andean highlands, but lacked the great silver mines of Peru. On the other hand, it had lots of fringe area, too, including great tropical forests and extensive cattle

frontiers. Ecuador, administratively part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, also had fully sedentary people in its string of high Andean valleys. Such areas with fully sedentary indigenous inhabitants, but without silver mines, lay somewhere between core and fringe in economic terms. Guatemala and Yucatán could be described that way, as well.

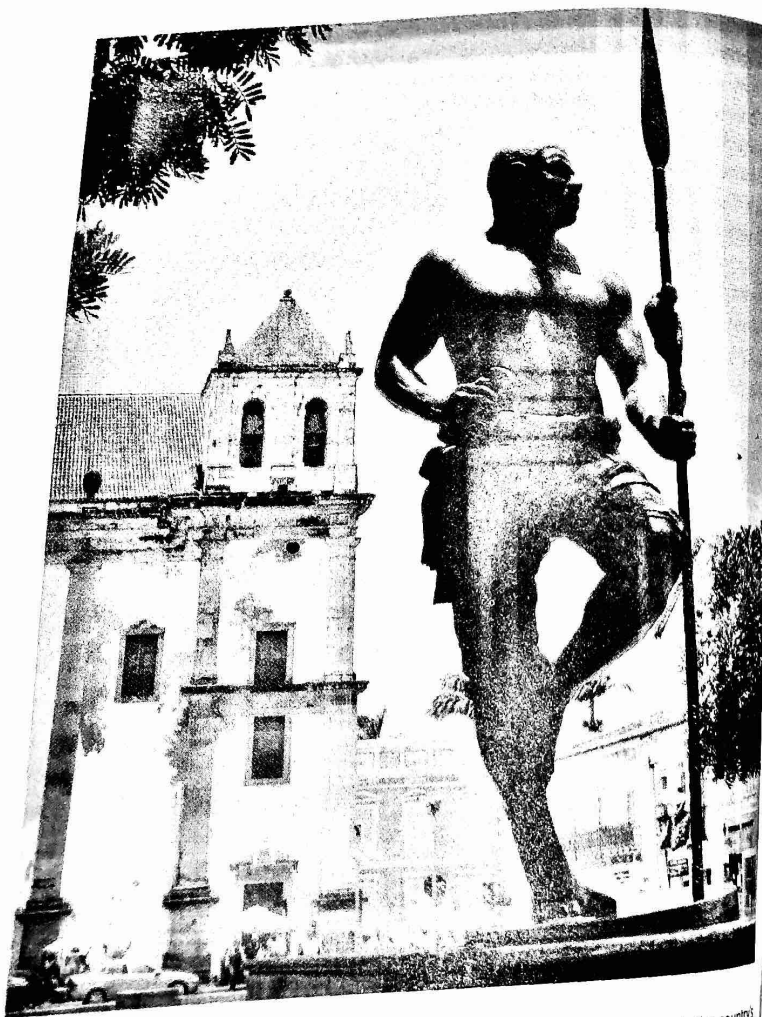
Some fringe areas underwent an economic boom at the end of the colonial period. The Río de la Plata found avid European markets for cattle hides. Cuba and Venezuela found profitable plantation crops. In Cuba, those crops were coffee and, especially, sugar. *Cacao* (which English tongues turned into "cocoa") ultimately proved better suited than sugarcane to the slopes of the mountainous Venezuelan coast. Throughout the Caribbean, plantation agriculture brought high profits but, along with them, the same grim social outcome of plantation agriculture everywhere—the massive forced migration of enslaved Africans.

Brazilian fringes resembled Spanish American fringes. Missions constituted the chief expression of Iberian presence. Few representatives of royal authority, few Portuguese of any description, in fact, could be found in the Brazilian backlands. Cattle ranchers, aiming to provide beef on the hoof for coastal plantations and cities, spread inland from the sugar coast into the arid sertão, especially up the long valley of the São Francisco River. Portuguese officials rarely followed them. For the most part, Portuguese colonization hugged the coast and left the backlands to the ranchers, to the surviving indigenous people, to Jesuit missionaries, and to the remarkable frontiersmen called *bandeirantes*, whose base was the mission town of São Paulo.

Today the industrial powerhouse of Brazil, São Paulo was very much a Brazilian backwater in the 1600s. One of the few Brazilian towns not a seaport, it had been founded by Jesuit missionaries at the top of a difficult escarpment that rises steeply from the Atlantic. São Paulo's colonial society faced inland, into the forest of southern Brazil, and indigenous influence was strong there. São Paulo landowners could not compete with the plantations of the sugar coast, and without export profits, the Portuguese settlers of São Paulo could not

buy many African slaves. Therefore, they depended on the labor of indigenous people. They could not afford the luxuries that would attract Portuguese wives, either, so they tended to cohabit with Tupi women. Thus the population of São Paulo did not follow the black-and-white pattern of the sugar coast, tending instead to be mestizo. A similar situation applied in the Amazonian region, in the arid sertão area of northeastern Brazil, and anywhere else beyond the sweet circle of the sugar economy.

In São Paulo and the other fringe regions of Brazil, the enslavement of indigenous people continued long after it had ceased on the sugar coast. To hunt slaves, São Paulo *bandeirantes* roamed the vast interior of the Brazilian subcontinent, traveling in canoes, not returning to São Paulo for months or years. Often, they overran missions and captured their inhabitants. Ironically, these slave hunters conversed not in Portuguese but in the generic Tupi, called *Lingua Geral*, that the Jesuits had used to teach Christianity. By the 1600s, *Lingua Geral* had become the most widely spoken language of the Brazilian interior. Gradually it disappeared, lingering only in remote Amazon regions. Some important *bandeirantes*, like Domingos Jorge Velho, did not speak Portuguese at all. He needed an interpreter to communicate with officials from Portugal. The *bandeirantes* chronically disobeyed the royal guidelines on legal enslavement, but they claimed loyalty to the Portuguese king and made themselves useful. They did not found settlements, but their explorations extended Portuguese claims deep into the continent. Velho's *bandeirantes* were also able to do what no other Portuguese force could—destroy Palmares, a settlement of escaped slaves, called a *quilombo* in Brazil, where there were hundreds. Palmares was one of the largest *quilombos* and certainly the best known, a collection of fortified villages that thrived in the hills behind the sugar coast for most of the 1600s. Zumbi, the warrior king of Palmares, led the last stand against the *bandeirantes*. When Zumbi died fighting in 1695, his head was stuck on a pike in a public square to quash rumors of his immortality. But the rumors were true: three centuries later, Zumbi stands incomparably as the most beloved Afro-Brazilian hero, a symbol of heroic resistance to the horrors of slavery.



ZUMBI, the warrior king of Palmares, Brazil's most famous quilombo, is the country's greatest Afro-Brazilian hero. iStock/Getty Images Plus.

Just before 1700, the bandeirantes discovered gold in the backlands. Now for the first time Portuguese settlers poured inland, and soon the precious metal upstaged sugar as the source of colonial profits in Brazil. The São Francisco River began to function as a highway for migrants from the sugar coast to the gold fields, which they named Minas Gerais, or General Mines. The bandeirantes regarded the newcomers as claim jumpers and derided their European-style clothing, calling them *emboabas*, or “fancy-pants.” As the gold rush grew, however, the bandeirantes were pushed aside. Slave owners from the sugar coast brought Africans to do the real work of mining. Crown officials began to collect the royal fifth, cities were built near the largest mines, and Brazil acquired its first substantial inland settlements. Vila Rica de Ouro Preto (meaning “rich town of black gold”), the capital of Minas Gerais, became one of Brazil’s most populous and prosperous cities in the 1700s, with lavish churches and close-packed two-story houses lining its winding streets. This gold financed the religious art of Aleijadinho, an affectionate nickname meaning “cripple.” Aleijadinho’s hands were crippled by leprosy. Sometimes unable to grip his tools, he had to tie his chisel to a ruined hand in order to work. But work he did, adorning church after church with his vigorous, expressive statues of biblical figures. Today, Aleijadinho, a mulatto, is recognized as the greatest Latin American sculptor. (The statues shown on page 50 are his work.)

The discovery of more gold, and even diamonds, in remote locations of the Brazilian interior—thanks, once again to the wandering bandeirantes—began the settlement of Goiás and Mato Grosso, even farther inland. São Paulo frontiersmen began to breed mules on the southern plains and drive them north to serve the mines. Brazil became more economically integrated. But the great Brazilian gold boom soon went bust. As generally occurs with gold rushes, the best deposits were easily panned out. Although many newcomers stayed to raise cattle, many others drifted away from Minas Gerais. Still, the Brazilian colony had changed shape as gold pulled its demographic and economic center southward. In 1763, the capital of Brazil was transferred from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro, a port city

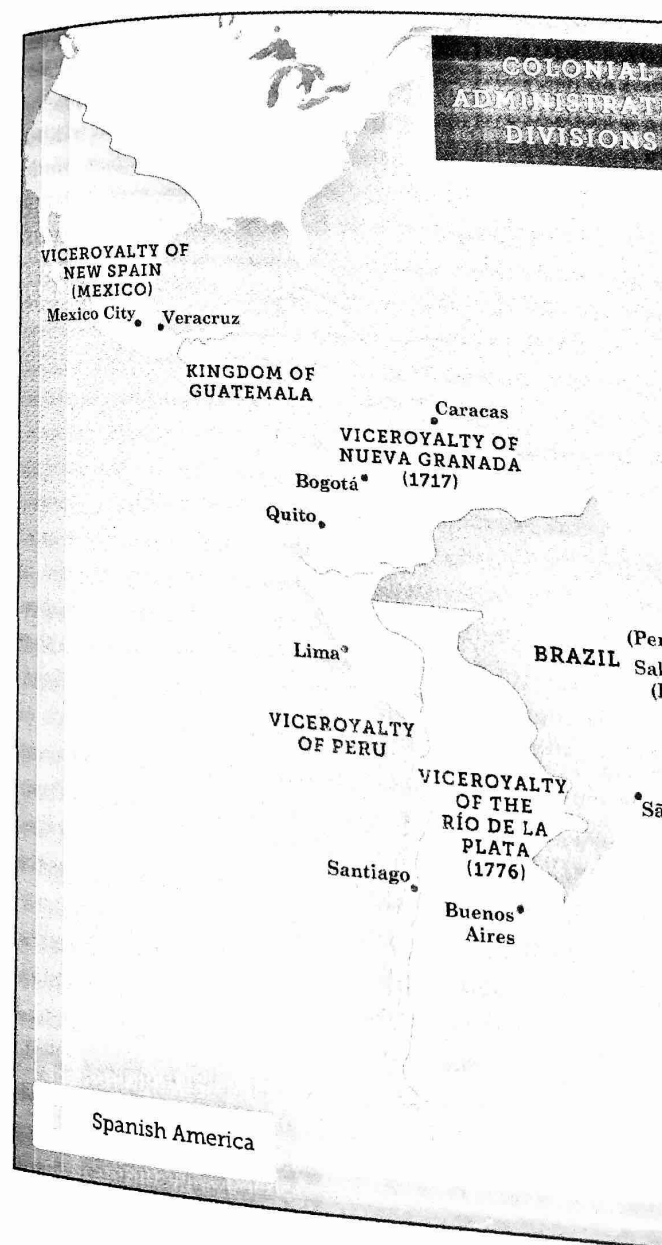
closer to Minas Gerais. Former fringe areas, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro now counted as part of central Brazil.

Of course, the distinction between core and fringe is only a rough guide, a conceptual model, not a neat physical reality. In fact, in the late 1700s the variety and distribution of Latin America's local cultures was already infinitely more complex than can be explained in a few paragraphs. Still, basic principles such as the core/fringe distinction help us understand many permutations.

LATE COLONIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

A final colonial pattern remains to be delineated: change over time. After the 1500s, the century of the Encounter, indigenous populations gradually recovered, and African slaves arrived in ever-larger numbers. During the 1600s, the basic social outlines of Spanish America and Brazil became well established as the descendants of conquerors and conquered found a *modus vivendi*. Contact with Europe was fairly limited, New World societies were fairly autonomous, and local political control was fairly stable. In the 1700s, economic forces, such as the Brazilian gold rush, gradually expanded the areas of Iberian settlement, and new viceroyalties were added, as has already been described. Around 1750, a further sort of transformation occurred, one that, in the long run, would spell trouble for Spanish and Portuguese dominance.

The transformation began when royal administrators in both Spain and Portugal planned to tighten their control over their New World possessions and extract more revenues from them. This new attitude was associated with the Bourbon dynasty that now ruled Spain and with a particularly powerful royal minister in Portugal, the Marquis de Pombal, and so the transformations are called Bourbon or Pombaline reforms, respectively. These reforms intended to rationalize and modernize the governance of overseas dominions by making them act more like colonies. The descendants of the conquerors liked to think that their heroic forefathers had carved out rich New World kingdoms for their monarchs.



kingdoms equal in importance and dignity to Old World kingdoms. But the Bourbon and Pombaline reformers regarded that as an old-fashioned idea. Modern European nations, they believed, should have *colonies* that served the economic interests of the mother countries. Among themselves, the reformers spoke of New World "colonies," rather than "kingdoms," but even if they avoided using the offensive term *colonial* in public discourse, their actual reforms were offensive enough.

The reformers' chief concern was increasing the profitability of the colonies for Spain and Portugal. Therefore, they raised taxes across the board and introduced all sorts of provisions to insure better collection of existing taxes, especially by revamping the framework of colonial administration. A frequent technique was the creation of state-controlled monopoly enterprises to oversee trade or production and sale of basic commodities, such as tobacco or alcohol, in order to maximize the revenue that they produced for the state. Mining, the single most lucrative sector of the colonial economy, received special attention in both Spanish America and Brazil, both to promote technical improvement and to stifle smuggling of untaxed gold and silver. To insure that colonial economies would serve Spain and Portugal better, the reformers also tightened limitations on production of certain goods, such as cloth or wine, in the Americas. They wanted colonials to buy cloth and wine from Spanish and Portuguese producers, not compete with them. To facilitate transatlantic economic integration beneficial to the mother countries, the reformers loosened restrictions on shipping, as long as the colonies traded exclusively with Spain and Portugal.

By tightening colonial control to serve European interests, the Bourbon and Pombaline reforms naturally injured the interests of people living in Spanish America and Brazil. Tax increases fell directly on some, such as indigenous people, who were little able to pay. The limitations on various sorts of trade and production put people out of work, and the new monopoly enterprises resulted in rising prices. No wonder the period after 1750 saw widespread revolts and protests with economic motivations, a relatively new form of unrest. The people with the most at stake in the

situation were the native-born Spanish American and Brazilian ruling classes, who lost influence in all sorts of ways. The Bourbon and Pombaline reformers reasoned, logically enough, that colonial officials would have European interests most at heart when they were themselves Europeans, while the native-born elite was much more likely to defend its own local interests. Because European-born Spaniards and Portuguese were regarded as superior agents of imperial control, they received systematic preferment throughout the civil and ecclesiastical power structures. The proud heirs of the conquerors began to lose the judgeships and administrative positions that they had previously enjoyed, a tremendous blow to their pride and to their opportunities for social advancement. And native-born elites suffered in other ways from the reformers' tightening of colonial control, too, particularly when the reformers expelled the Jesuit order from both Brazil (1759) and Spanish America (1767). The Jesuits had offered a prestigious career path to capable young men of the New World, and they had provided rare educational opportunities to the ruling class. But the Jesuits had a habit of resisting royal authority, something that the reformers would not tolerate.

Young men of haughty elite families were bumping up against a glass ceiling just as socially climbing young men of more humble families crowded them from below. The late colonial period saw a marked rise in the portion of the population that was not white, not indigenous, and not African, but culturally and racially mixed. Mixed people were people-in-between. They occupied the middle rungs on the social ladder, with whites above them and Africans and indigenous people farther down. They were products of centuries of transculturation, speaking a variety of languages, well able to negotiate the various social worlds of the colonial environment, superbly adapted to succeed in their diverse social milieu.

Transculturation usually occurred along with some sort of race mixing. Obviously, transculturation can happen without any mixing of genes, and vice versa. Nevertheless, in Latin American history, transcultural mixing and race mixing go together.

Race mixing could mean several things here. It could mean social interaction and shared experience—rarely on a basis of equality, of course, but still meaningful in human terms—as when apprentice artisans of various colors labored and caroused together, or when white rural families spent their whole lives—their childhood, their workaday routine, their moments of deep personal significance—surrounded by slaves, indigenous people, or free people of mixed race. On the other hand, race mixing often meant sex as well. Intermarriage among poor whites, blacks, and indigenous people was common, as were consensual partnerships. Often *not* consensual, or only superficially so, were the sexual encounters between social unequals of different race, as when “gentlemen” hired prostitutes or forced themselves on enslaved women.

The story of Xica da Silva is extreme rather than typical, memorable rather than anonymous. Xica became celebrated, and also notorious, in the diamond fields of Brazil. Her mother was African and her father was Portuguese. The riches of the diamond fields flowed into the pocket of the king’s royal diamond contractor. He could buy whatever he wanted. What he wanted was Xica da Silva for his mistress, but she did not come cheap. For her he had to provide rich clothing, a place of honor at church, a dozen maids-in-waiting, a park with artificial waterfalls, even an artificial lake with a miniature sailing ship. (Xica had always wanted to see the ocean.) Now she wore a powdered wig, and people came to her seeking access to her lover, the diamond contractor. One of her sons—not the diamond contractor’s—studied at European universities. Her disdainful reference to certain Portuguese visitors rang in people’s memories. “Butler,” she famously said, “take care of the *sailor boys*,” using the scornful Brazilian slang for Portuguese immigrants just off the boat. When she called the Portuguese “sailor boys,” Xica da Silva, a Brazilian woman of mixed race, was daring to look down on European men—flying in the face of the caste system.

To exercise control over colonial Latin American societies, the Iberian Crowns sorted people into fixed categories called *castes*, as in India. The caste system was all about pedigree, so it more or less corresponded to what people today call “race.” In practice, the



CASTE PAINTING from eighteenth-century Mexico. Caste paintings tried to systematize an unruly reality of race mixing. The painting’s original caption reads, “Mestizo plus Indian equals Coyote.” De Agostini/G. Dagli Orti/Getty Images.

caste system also factored in other characteristics, such as education, clothing, and especially wealth. “Money whitens,” according to a famous phrase expressing the importance of wealth in the Latin American caste system. A person’s caste classification was noted in the baptismal register at the time of baptism, and people of low caste were legally prevented from becoming priests, attending the university, wearing silk, owning weapons, and many other things. A person wholly of European descent occupied one category in the system, and a person entirely of African descent occupied another. That much is quite familiar from US race relations. But the child of a European and an African belonged to a third category—half European, half African, logically enough. There was a fourth category for a child with a European father and an indigenous mother, and a fifth for a child whose parents were indigenous and African. Indigenous

people had a category to themselves, making six. And this was just the beginning.

Members of these six categories continued to produce babies with each other, despite official rules against this, creating new people-in-between who confounded the categories and strained the system. At least in theory, caste categories proliferated geometrically—to sixteen or more, including some with animal names, *Lobo* and *Coyote*—during the last century of colonial rule. These names are from the 1700s in Mexico, where many series of paintings were commissioned to illustrate the caste system. Such caste paintings were titled, for example, *An Español and a Mulata make a Morisco*, with father, mother, and child shown in a domestic setting, each with the appropriate clothing, demeanor, and skin color. Caste paintings were sent to Spain, where imperial officials viewed them much as species classifications in natural history. Above all, these strange works were intended to help impose order on the unruly reality of race mixing. The dozen or so new caste names never really gained everyday currency, and they should be viewed mostly as a symptom of the strain that progressive race mixing was putting on the caste system by the late 1700s.

Also in these years, successful people of low caste (prosperous mule drivers or artisans, for example) presented a different challenge to the caste system. Perpetually in need of money, the Spanish Crown sometimes allowed such people to buy an official exemption that made them legally white and eligible to occupy positions of distinction and authority. This exemption was called *gracias al sacar*. Whites with little else going for them except for caste privilege complained bitterly about the sale of legal whiteness, saying it undermined the whole caste system. The sale of *gracias al sacar* also exemplified the Latin American tendency to think of race as a negotiable spectrum, a ladder that families might ascend. Families could climb the ladder, even without legal exemptions, when daughters and sons were able to marry “up”—which is to say, find partners lighter than themselves. Note, however, that moving “up” by marrying for skin color also meant buying into the logic of the caste system, with its premise of white superiority. Therefore, race mixing provides a tracer of transculturation (and cultural hegemony) in action.

Whether valued, abhorred, or merely tolerated, race mixing was a fact of colonial life in Latin America. By 1800, near the end of the colonial period, people of mixed blood already made up roughly a quarter of the Latin American population, and these people-in-between were also the fastest-growing group. The African and indigenous majority had adopted much from the Spanish and Portuguese. They had made a cultural impact of their own. In living together, with all the conflicts that entailed, people of diverse origin had created shared identities and unifying webs of loyalty. By the year 1800, even white Spanish Americans and Brazilians, roughly another quarter of the population, were noticing that many of their habits and preferences, such as their taste in music, now made them different from their European cousins and in some ways a bit like the people below them in the colonial hierarchy. Still, few colonials assigned much importance to a distinctive American identity in 1800.

The wars of independence would change that.