



LATIN AMERICA AND THE ORIGINS OF ITS TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

MICHAEL MONTEÓN

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MICHAEL MONTEÓN

PRAEGER

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Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Monteón, Michael, 1946-

Latin America and the origins of its twenty-first century / Michael Monteón.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-313-35249-2 (acid-free paper) — ISBN 978-0-313-35250-8 (ebook) 1. Latin America—History—20th century. 2. Latin America—History—21st century. I. Title.

F1414.M576 2010

980.03—dc22 2009046181


14 13 12 11 10 1 2 3 4 5

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ABC-CLIO, LLC

130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911

Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

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For Betty, who loved and endured
And for my students, my teachers

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Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: The Structure of an Interpretation	xi
Chapter 1 ∞ The Long Nineteenth Century, <i>Caudillaje</i> , Power, and the People	1
City and Countryside	3
Labor: Indian, Slave, and Free	15
The Origins of National Governments	27
Pax Britannica	36
Chapter 2 ∞ Oligarchy and the Impact of New Wealth, 1880–1914	49
The Newest City	52
Boulevards and Streetcars	52
The Working Class	60
Buenos Aires	63
Peasants and Landed Power	70
The Challenges to Oligarchy	75
Imperial Shift	84
Chapter 3 ∞ Revolutions and Modernization, 1910–1955	91
A Different Direction	94
<i>Chilangolandia</i>	95
The Mexican Revolution	108

Populism and the Oligarchies	125
Peronismo	130
Populist Frustrations	141
The United States as a Hegemonic Power	160
The Anticommunist Crusade	161
Two Revolutionary Movements: Bolivia and Guatemala	165
Chapter 4 ∞ Modern Life and Modern Conflicts, 1956–1985	175
Santiago and the Pinochet Dictatorship	176
The Population Explosion	187
Causes and Consequences of the Population Boom	188
The Misinterpretations of Urban Poverty	194
Arts and Communication	196
The Cold War and Guerrilla Dreams	199
The Cuban Revolution	201
The Brazilian Model	207
Guerrilla Warfare	214
The Dilemmas of Development	228
Chapter 5 ∞ Launched into the Present	233
São Paulo, the Newest City	237
The Collapse of Military Capitalism	245
The Shock Treatment	249
The End of the Guerrilla Left	255
Mexico Revisited	269
The Latin-Americanization of the United States	280
Blowback	290
Migration	297
Conclusion: The Twenty-First Century Has Begun	303
Notes	319
Bibliography	363
Index	407

Acknowledgments

My debts in writing this work are lifelong and range from my parents, who began taking me to Mexico, their homeland, from the time I was twelve, to my students of today who continue to ask questions that require my looking up the answer. I specifically want to acknowledge my colleagues who have worked with me over more than three decades at the University of California, San Diego, and the many visitors in Latin American studies that have visited our campus from all parts of that region and from our own nation, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe. The Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies and the Center for U.S. Mexican Studies have been the focal points of an active community discussing what had happened and what was occurring in the region. I am also indebted to my colleagues in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile who have permitted me to present my work at their universities and institutes and often invited me into their homes—much of my understanding of Latin Americans as a people comes from our shared moments.

My colleagues in the History Department shared their insights into their fields and so forced me to reconsider generalizations about my own; it is amazing how reading “cutting-edge” work in another area of historical study creates insight into why things have happened as they did in Latin America. I am most indebted to David Ringrose, who shared his many ideas of Spain and America and their parallel developments. I am proud to be part of a team that has created one of our nation’s best programs in Latin American history.

Ramón E. Ruiz started this program and was instrumental in recruiting me to my first and, it turns out, my last professional position. The late James Scobie gave it a gravitas in South American history. Christine Hünefeldt, Everard Meade, and Eric Van Young, and I have taught students who now hold positions in some of our most prestigious research universities and liberal colleges. To all, my deepest gratitude.

Introduction: The Structure of an Interpretation

Latin America's complexities require a scheme of interpretation rather than an encyclopedic listing of qualities. The scheme of this work grows out of teaching the field for over thirty-six years. In that time, I have taught numerous national histories, although most of my courses involved the region's major nations: Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Topical courses focused on urbanization, U.S. behavior in the region, and dictators. Even so, writing this work has been a learning experience for me: a means of revisiting topics that had accumulated mounds of new research and exploring those required for the coherence of the work's arguments. This is not a survey, and many topics and issues of importance have been omitted. An interpretation must have a theme, and this one focuses on power and the Latin American people who have developed and endured its uses over the last century and a half.

Power seems a tricky subject, but it is fairly straightforward. It is also somewhat old-fashioned in the American academic world because the social sciences broke it down into discussions of "fields" and "variables." Although this work does summarize various approaches to the subject of Latin American history, it takes a broad view of how the region has emerged from the twentieth century. It stresses elements internal to the region—its political forms, shared cultural values, racial disparities, and the grotesquely uneven distribution of wealth and income. Power, as seen here, also has a form, and its principal geographic arrangement is the city, especially those centers of authority and commerce that became in the course of the

twentieth century the region's primary cities. The mutation of these cities shaped the countryside by authorizing who would be allowed to control the nations' agrarian zones, their mines, their transport systems, and their labor.

The decisions made in earlier periods roll into later ones. For example, Latin America had large estates in the colonial era, and it has had them in the national one. This does not mean that the former are the same as the latter. National capitals shaped economic policies and aligned their countries with foreign powers and their markets, thus developing their agricultural policies to meet the needs of urban growth. The confusing and consistent element in the early phases of national development in Latin America is that landowners governed the nations, and so, obviously, they used national power to foster their own wealth. They did so in league with merchants and sometimes with mine owners, forming a commercial-agricultural nexus, a commercial-mining nexus, or a commercial-industrial nexus, or some combination of the three that facilitated urban economic growth. This attitude that urban life represented civilization—whereas rural existence involved the uncivilized, the ignorant, and the barbaric—is in sharp contrast with American sensibilities, which often praised the bucolic life over that of vice-ridden cities. It is an attitude far more European than is that of the United States.

Thus, each chapter begins with a description of a city in some way representative of its nation's power nexus. It explains how the city operated, how it looked, and how its people lived. In dealing with cities and countryside, each chapter also looks at the impact of technology, the prevailing ideology, the interactions of urban and rural populations, and the extent to which rural populations could avoid urban dictates. Power has rarely been exercised on behalf of the poor, the native, or the Black in Latin America—of course, the same could be said of the United States. The major difference is that the poor and non-White populations made up the majority of Latin America, and the powerful were White—or thought they were White—and had to control their inferiors. Racism was endemic: European cultures were superior to all others, and modernization became equated with Europeanizing everyone. The other shared quality is the role of Catholicism in the foundations of the colonies and the early nations.

Power, therefore, is something more than politics, although it is often distilled into political conflicts. Latin American nations all

became constitutional republics, yet not a single one has effectively empowered its inhabitants. Indeed, they must be called inhabitants or people, for they have rarely been citizens. Citizens have rights and the suffrage, and with both, they can shape what party or faction holds office. Periods of effective citizenship are the exception and not the rule in Latin America, which has had more than its share of dictators, corrupt figureheads, and incompetents as chief executives. A ruling class that did not see the majority of the nation's people as civilized and capable often resorted to autocratic or oligarchic rule to preserve itself. This does not mean that people did not have any power over their lives. In the political arenas or the cultural ones, Latin Americans had political consciousness and resisted authority that aimed to exploit them or seize their resources. They acted on their own ideals, often democratic. The history of Latin America is not just that of presidents but also of laborers, peasants, and activists favoring education, public housing, public medicine, and social welfare. It is also about those who opposed empowering the people. When popular movements were stopped, Latin Americans resorted to guerrilla warfare and even revolution to win what they hoped would be a better future.

Holders of office, laborers, and peasants did not function in a global vacuum. External powers saw riches to be had and their own geopolitical goals to be advanced by aligning themselves with interests within Latin America. On the whole, those powers, especially Great Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth, helped the already rich and powerful in Latin America to become more so. When acting in the region, they brought their own racist attitudes, technology, and commercial networks that altered the power structures within the region. They did not run everything, but they influenced a good deal. An Argentine landowner who sold beef to England in the 1880s could evolve into a cattle baron, with wealth well beyond his ancestors' dreams. A Mexican town located on the rail lines built by British or American capital could become a city; towns without rail lines often withered in the early twentieth century. Most of all, Great Britain and the United States supplied capital to Latin America and set conditions for its use. After 1898, the United States made first the Caribbean and then the region as a whole part of its sphere of influence, subjecting them to economic ideas it favored and demanding that the region's nations treat its enemies as their own. To enforce its views, it often deployed its military or supported militarism in Latin America.

The confluence of domestic issues and foreign demands changed in each era discussed. Within each Latin American nation, elites used forms of power taken from abroad—capital, firearms and military technology, industrial machinery, and political and legal ideas—to alter or, as they preferred to call it, “reform” their nations. As they did so, they expanded their cities at the expense of their countryside. As the population in Latin America increased, the disparity between urban and rural life became so great that development in the twentieth century became synonymous with greater urbanization. As cities—particularly the largest ones—grew, the populations within them demonstrated and rioted to gain better accommodations, wages, and prospects for their children. The class struggle in Latin America did not evolve as Marx would have predicted, but it was real enough. It grew in such intensity that, fearing revolution, elites turned to military rule to silence dissent and stop demands from the labor force. The official violence that took the lives of several hundred thousand and ended the effort to mobilize workers and peasants into state-supported institutions leads to the work’s climax in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five closes the twentieth century and begins the twenty-first. It had seemed since the end of the Cold War that liberalism—the belief that markets should decide the allocation of resources and labor, with little regard to state intervention or regulations to protect laborers and provide the general population a life of dignity—had won the struggle. The triumphant liberalism of the late nineteenth century had ended in the Great Depression. An earlier historiography had foreseen some of what would follow—the increase in the size of the middle class, the modernization of life, the rise of a consumer culture, and greater government spending on public goods and services—as the portent of a more democratic and prosperous region. The economy grew but not as expected. People lived longer but poverty lingered and affected half or more than half of the population in most Latin American nations. Far from establishing a better age, the crisis of economic growth and social needs led to military rule, mass murder, mass exodus from a number of countries, and neoliberalism.

The struggle for public welfare now seemed sandwiched between one liberal era and another. But now we are obviously at the end of the neoliberal period. Capitalist excesses have led the United States to abandon any thought that the crisis of 2008–2009 can be resolved

without massive government spending. If this is true of the most successful capitalist country in the world, how can we expect that Latin America will not find some way to revive a form of a political economy that emphasizes social needs as much as it does profits and the current indifference to the poor?

At each stage of misdevelopment—what else can it be called?—Latin American cities have grown and its rural populations have struggled. It has now passed through a series of changes that cannot be undone. It has become urbanized, which has enormous ramifications for its future. Its nations have increased their populations by multiples as high as ten times what they had been in the late nineteenth century. The age-old issues of massive poverty, social injustice, and the lack of effective citizenship remain. How Latin America changed so much and still has such a pressing agenda is the subject of this interpretation.

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CHAPTER 1

The Long Nineteenth Century, *Caudillaje*, Power, and the People



Latin American societies, for all their distinctions from one another, have some qualities in common. They are societies created as preindustrial colonies, that is, peoples whose cultures and racial makeup were largely determined by having been conquered by Spain or Portugal. Argentina and parts of Uruguay and Brazil are exceptions to this pattern, but exceptions only in the racial sense. One of the great mysteries of Latin American history is why Argentina, a nation that began the twentieth century with such economic success, ended the century a crippled shadow of what it might have been. In all these societies, a colonial heritage created political and social attitudes that were not conducive to the construction of democratic civil societies. And yet, Latin America has a public life, not merely governments, but activists who are trying to improve their lives and the welfare of their people. An account of their past must first admit that their societies announced republican values in the nineteenth century, and it must also explain why these announcements were not fulfilled.

This contrast between the colonial and national societies extends from the French Revolution up to World War I, but it is strongest in the nineteenth century. In Latin America, the chronology is somewhat shorter but strongly related to changes in Europe. It is likely that the region would not have broken with Spain and Portugal when it did had the French Revolution not taken a specific course. Even though most of the nations of the region were born in the aftermath of events in Europe, their evolution had a great deal to do with changes within the Americas. It is a cliché in the literature of the

region that Latin America was not ready to become a series of nation-states, let alone republics, in the early nineteenth century, but this is true of most postcolonial societies. The Spanish and Portuguese empires did not want their colonies to develop autonomous political institutions. The need to create such institutions thus came in the same shock as the break with the imperial overlord and involved a crisis of politics and culture of the first order.

Those institutions—particularly the Spanish aristocracy, the merchant guilds, and the Church, all of which had exercised economic and cultural power in the colonial era—suddenly found themselves on the defensive. Individuals who had hardly counted in colonial societies used military force to put themselves forward as national leaders. The meaning of the nation became bound up with the issues of who should lead and for what purpose. For most Latin Americans—living in small towns, scattered hamlets, plantations, haciendas, and homesteads—such questions seemed distant at first but quickly struck home. People who had never been consulted about colonial politics suddenly were recruited into armies on behalf of the new nations or the king or emperor. In the Spanish colonies, the result tore apart the political and social fabrics that the empire had been at pains to repair and strengthen in the late eighteenth century. In Brazil, the outcome was much less violent but still disorienting.

We must draw at the beginning of this narrative a sharp contrast between popular mobilization and democracy. All types of regimes recruit the populace to do their bidding and all types provoke popular demonstrations against them, but democracy requires an accepted set of political rules, among which are a sense of inclusion as a citizen, free and open elections, and civil rights. Most Latin Americans had none of these things in the nineteenth century; in fact, many Latin Americans did not experience an effective civil society even at the end of the twentieth century. Instead, mobilizations took place around established or created loyalties, particularly in the name of religion or of republican nationalism. But these mobilizations were intended to impose minority government, whether by a person or a group. The language of freedom was often used, but the reality was that Latin American politics would never generate the respect of citizens for one another that is the heart of a liberal, constitutional order.

Instead, power would be rearranged geographically into national units while maintaining certain cultural continuities from the

colonial past. To explain how that happened requires looking always to the cities, which in the late colonial era had been the centers of imperial administration. Cities created in the colonies tried to become new national capitals; their efforts to impose their will involved a struggle not only against imperial rule but also against the colonial elements that preferred localized, rural authority. To look at the origins of the twenty-first century, attention must be paid to how Latin America turned colonies into nation-states.

CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE

Latin America in the twentieth century grew out of a long crisis in the nineteenth century. The crisis involved the collapse of imperial systems in Spanish America and Brazil and the attempt to construct national political systems. All this seems straightforward, except that postcolonial societies are never simple and the collapse of empires had far-reaching consequences that would disrupt every layer of society.¹ Understandably, the societies that emerged in the 1820s were led by elites on the defensive, anxious to find the means to pay for governments and the armies they required, and to maintain what remained of colonial networks, both social and economic. Just as understandably, those who were not in the elite saw political opportunity—a chance to seize office, to assert a regional or rural independence, to break colonial patterns that they resented, or to hang on to colonial privileges and rights that they felt were threatened.

The best place to begin a narrative of this crisis and its outcome—namely, the construction of national oligarchies—is in the colonial cities. Most of the major cities of the Spanish and Portuguese empires had been created by the late 1600s, although many in the late colonial era were still extremely small. The nucleus of Buenos Aires, which became the seat of a viceroyalty of the Rio de la Plata in 1776, looked like a *pueblito*, a place with a plaza surrounded by mud huts. Prior to the arrival of the Prince Regent Dom João in 1808, Rio de Janeiro was the viceregal center of Brazil but with little to declare its importance. Two of the major urban centers of Latin America stood out in size and beauty, Mexico City and Lima, respectively the centers of the Viceroyalties of New Spain and of Peru, each of which had been established in the early sixteenth century. Indeed, Mexico City at the end of the colonial era, with 250,000 inhabitants,

was larger than Madrid, nominally the center of royal authority, which had about 180,000.

The Spanish and Portuguese empires had created trade grids that turned on sea power and mule trains. The transatlantic powers shipped slaves from Africa and manufactures from Europe to the Americas, but a major part of the trade was internal within the colonies. The Portuguese in Brazil relied on coasting vessels to tie their various regional economies together. The Spanish Americans had extensive trade networks that moved silver, mercury, and gold to some areas in return for grains, hides, domestic textiles, and such items as *yerba mate* (Paraguayan tea), which was the staple beverage of most of Spanish South America and used extensively in Brazil as well. A rivalry existed between the Spanish and Portuguese Americans in the regions adjoining their colonies, but even so, the Americas were more bound by trade links, however loosely knit, than by fear of attack. Spanish America had a common currency, the silver peso, valued throughout Europe and its trade routes.

Cities served in these colonies, as they had in all preindustrial societies, for the social organization of power. They contained within them the centers of political administration (the royal bureaucracy), the judiciary, the Roman Catholic Church's administrative apparatuses, and the centers of merchant authority, that is, the guilds. Their architecture reflected the Baroque era with its elaborate ornamentation, but most buildings were constrained by the small size of the populations and the fact that a good part of Latin America sits astride zones known for earthquakes or hurricanes. Late in the eighteenth century, the imperial centers of Lisbon and Madrid had begun reorganizing state power, and their efforts reached the colonies in major ways. The Church's power was slightly curtailed and the Jesuits, belonging to the richest and most powerful religious order in the Americas, were expelled from the region. The empires also created new administrative centers, moving the capital of Brazil from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro in 1763, and creating new viceroyalties in Spanish America. Bogotá became the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada as early as 1717, and Buenos Aires became the center of the Viceroyalty of Rio de La Plata in 1776. Trade and immigration became easier between the Iberian peninsula and the Americas, and new taxes were imposed, thus improving the colonial capacity to protect major centers from attack by other European powers and to administer ever larger areas.

The colonies had complex societies, but in form, there was an imperial aristocracy and a mass of commoners. However, a commoner could rarely encroach on imperial authority. A few bought their way into the upper level of society. What would seem to us minor differences in social origin carried great weight in the colonial world, and the upper ranks were often merciless in their snobbery. Most people, of course, had little to worry about in this regard because they did not live in cities and were rural, poor, and illiterate. Nonetheless, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Bourbon Reforms in Spanish America and the changes instituted by the Marquis de Pombal, Portugal's minister, triggered such rebellions against authority as that of Tiradentes in Brazil (1789) and the Comunero Rebellion in Colombia (1780–1781). In each instance, changes in administration and taxation caused resistance. The most serious and violent rebellion was led by Tupac Amaru II (as José Gabriel Condorcanqui had renamed himself) and involved tens of thousands of Native Americans seeking to undo recent administrative changes; the rebels even thought of independence from Spanish authority. The uprising began in 1780 and gradually was contained after its leader's brutal execution the following year. However, none of the rebellions succeeded, and as the Americas entered the 1800s, it seemed that neither Spanish America nor Brazil would join the United States in breaking with Europe.²

The decisive event in the future of Latin America took place in Europe, when in 1808 Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain and Portugal in an attempt to block the British from trading with Europe. Britain and France had been hostile to each other since the beginning of the French Revolution; in 1808, the British came to the rescue of the members of the Portuguese royal family of Bragança by having their ships carry them and a significant part of the Portuguese aristocracy to Rio de Janeiro. Napoleon captured the Spanish royal family and then put his brother on its throne. War broke out over the Iberian peninsula, and the Spanish people waged guerilla warfare against the invaders. All this plunged both Brazil and Spanish America into political crises, with broad ramifications for the preservation of imperial power. The move of the throne to Brazil meant that Rio now became the headquarters of the entire Portuguese Empire—a contest for office and influence began within Brazil between the new arrivals and the Brazilian elite. At least this change did not involve extensive violence. In Spanish America, Napoleon's invasion created

political instability by raising the question of who should rule in the absence of the legitimate king. No one entertained recognizing French authority, but should the Spanish Americans pledge allegiance to the Spanish rebel forces or reconstruct the bases of imperial authority in the New World?

Many have argued that the wars of independence in Spanish America did not really change the social structure of authority. This cannot be true. No society that has gone through the process of colonization anywhere else in the world has come out of it unaffected whenever there were wars of nationalism or liberation. Indeed, every former colony confronts two simultaneous realities: there is no going back to any period before colonization and there is no going forward without reorganizing the basis of politics, a process that itself changes social outcomes. Although a Europeanized elite based on color remained socially dominant in all the new nations, the changes triggered by Latin American independence were profound. None of them resolved the crisis created in 1808, some in fact made that crisis worse, but Latin America began a new course that would not become clear in its direction until the second half of the nineteenth century. At the outset of independence, political leaders intended that the old imperial centers would become the new national ones. To an extraordinary degree, they got their wish. Not a single new city became the political capital of a nation until Brasília was inaugurated in 1960. Everywhere else, national power devolved to the old colonial centers, but not in the manner the leaders of independence had imagined. Independence raised the critical issues of political legitimacy and administrative continuity. Leaders in one city often refused to recognize the authority of those in another, beginning a process of political fragmentation. Thus, Asunción broke with Buenos Aires and carved Paraguay out of part of the viceroyalty Buenos Aires had governed; Montevideo (with British support) broke away as well and became the capital of Uruguay. The Confederation of Gran Colombia broke down into Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador; the Viceroyalty of Peru divided into Peru, Bolivia, and Chile; and Central America became a series of smaller countries.

The outward form of government was quickly established, and all the new states, except Mexico and Brazil, became republics. Mexico established an empire in 1822 and 1823 with a military man, Agustín de Iturbide, at its helm. But the empire collapsed with his overthrow

and Mexico became a republic as well—completing the sweep of republican government in Spanish America. Brazil retained an imperial structure but established a constitution even before independence. When the war with France ended and the King Dom João returned to Lisbon, he left his son, Prince Dom Pedro I, in charge of Brazil. In order to renew their control of Brazil, the Portuguese legislature ordered Dom Pedro to return as well, and when he refused, he began the process of independence in 1822. Skirmishes occurred but Dom Pedro had the support of the cities and promised constitutional guarantees that made him seem quite liberal. He also had the support of British naval officers led by Lord Cochrane (who had earlier taken part in the Spanish American wars of independence). By 1823, Brazil's independence was a fact. Even though Dom Pedro's quarrels with Brazilian elites led him in 1830 to abdicate to his son Dom Pedro II (who was then four years old), Brazil remained an empire, with a formal aristocracy, a legislature, and elections.³

In Spanish America, aside from Cuba and Puerto Rico, which remained colonies of Spain, most of the heads of the new governments were the leaders of military units. Politics collapsed into armed rivalries. Barracks uprisings with the inevitable man on horseback and his list of justifications (the *pronunciamento*) made administrative continuity in many areas almost impossible. Coups and civil wars proliferated in the 1820s in most of Spanish America; even the Brazilian Empire faced armed conspiracies. Many of those who seized power looted the treasuries and ran up foreign debts to pay their forces, thereby weakening any future administration. By the late 1820s, Latin America was in its first debt crisis, in which British bankers refused the new nations any further credit (these debts persisted into the late nineteenth century). The financial problems of the national administrations in turn limited their military effectiveness; the use of force became localized and even based on private wealth.

Thus, the end of European domination had destroyed or seriously weakened aristocracies in Latin America. In many areas, Spanish and Portuguese merchants had been driven out as well. The imperial trade was ruined and never recovered; the internal trade patterns of Spanish America were also broken by the imposition of new, national tariffs; in Brazil, local tariffs harmed interregional links. The major cities lost more than political power; they often suffered severe economic reversals. The network of imperial taxation broke

down, and so did the imperial monetary systems. The absence of an effective state meant that public investment and communications collapsed. Until well into the nineteenth century, it took weeks to travel in Chile from Santiago to the southern agricultural areas near Concepción. Going by ship from Mérida, in the Yucatán peninsula, to London was much faster than traveling by horse or mule to Mexico City. An ineffective state also meant that crime flourished in many areas—a pattern that was set loose in the looting during the wars of independence. The administrative reach of cities shrank into itself, so much so that by the 1830s many of the national capitals are better described as city-states that controlled their hinterland and little else. Many regions in such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru had little to do with their national capitals and were instead nucleated around regional centers or even large estates and villages. Elites continued to run regions, but they ran “nations” only by creating pacts to respect one another’s terrain; in some areas, life broke down into a type of feudalism in which local populations counted on armed landlords to secure their survival. The most decisive events in the early crisis were the rise of armed, rural powers and the fact that rural authority could often overwhelm and control political capitals.

If a visitor to the late colonial cities of Mexico City, Lima, Santiago de Chile, or Caracas had been able to return to those cities in 1860, he or she would have recognized the same places. Industrialization had barely touched them. Each city was organized around a central, square plaza with sides dominated by a cathedral, an administrative center, and a market. The cities’ sights and sounds were still preindustrial. In the larger cities, there were shops enclosed in established buildings, but many cities, even into the twentieth century, had markets of tents, pitched up during the day and taken down at night. Street peddlers and vendors on mules—selling food, water, milk, and small manufactures and singing out their wares—rounded out urban commercial life. The city had to be supplied every day, for there were few means of preserving foods. Most things were handmade, and artisans played important roles, socially and politically. Women produced cloth using foot looms and made enormous pottery jugs to haul milk and water. Also, they made up a major part of the vendors; in many smaller cities, vending from tents or mules was dominated by women—in Lima, it was dominated by Black women.

Throughout Spanish America, in a pattern imposed during the Conquest, the city spread out from the central square in a regular grid pattern. Brazilian cities, although often organized in a grid as well, had winding streets that followed the contours of the land. The cities themselves seemed small, even those with populations in the tens of thousands. Most of the “urban” residents lived in the countryside surrounding the city, and so urban life was not strikingly different from rural existence. What is more, because there were few means of public transportation and most people were poor, a city had to remain a place that could be walked easily and quickly. Rio de Janeiro could be crossed in about twenty minutes.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the major cities were in a sense occupied by their countryside. Hacendados and plantation owners had wielded enormous influence on the crowns of Spain and Portugal. Freed of imperial control, landlord power became even more assertive. Formally, politics moved along two axes: the liberal/conservative one and the federalist/centralist. We can imagine them by creating a square with four quarters: liberal federalist, conservative federalist, liberal centralist, and conservative centralist (see Table 1.1). These rough divisions appeared in the wars of independence and continued through a good part of the nineteenth century.

Although liberals led the fights for independence, they lacked the financial means and ideological support to consolidate their rule in the 1820s. In state after state, they gave way to conservatives, whose viewpoints dominated the region until the second half of the century. The conservatives were closely identified with the protection of Catholicism

TABLE 1.1 Political Axes of Latin America, 1820–1914

	<i>Liberal</i>		<i>Conservative</i>	
Federalist	Porfirio Díaz (1876), Mexico	Cipriano Castro (1901), Venezuela	Juan Manuel Rosas (1828), Argentina	José Antonio Paez (1830s), Venezuela
Centralist	Simón Bolívar (1820), Liberator of Northern South America	Bernardo O’Higgins (1820), Liberator of Chile	José de Iturbide, (1820), Emperor of Mexico	Diego Portales (1833), Chile

as a state religion, and they wanted to maintain social practices and forms of labor inherited from the colonies. The liberals claimed that they wanted to break with colonial practices and the forced labor systems; they blamed Spain and Portugal for their nations' backwardness and looked to Great Britain and the United States as models of progress. The single greatest element dividing liberals and conservatives was religion, with liberals wanting a toleration of Protestants and even a separation of church and state. But the rift between liberals and conservatives was more than ideology or religion: it involved a cultural divide of feelings, especially among men, that triggered passionate political stances. Worse, the persecutions practiced by liberals against conservatives in the 1820s, and the retaliations by conservatives by the 1830s and thereafter, led to political loyalties based on clan, regional identities, and a desire for revenge.

The other axis involved the power of cities over the nation. Would Latin American nations be organized into political administrations with one major city writing the rules for each country, or would power be distributed to provincial and local governments throughout each nation? The federalists demanded that power be localized and a national administration should consist of collective decisions made by local interests. Exactly how all this would be done varied from nation to nation; in general, federalists wanted a pattern of government similar to that of the United States or to that of Spain, which acknowledged regional rights. The fights between federalists and centralists contributed to national subdivisions and the regional fragmentation already noted.

Here, the experience of Brazil is instructive. The Portuguese colony of Brazil became a single nation, but the country had no strong leader. A regency run by a committee held effective royal power while Dom Pedro II was growing up. Regional dissension in the 1820s threatened to splinter the nation, but Whites had to consider what might happen if political dissidents mobilized Blacks (free and slave). In 1835, a slave uprising, led by Muslims in the city of Salvador, Bahia—the historic center of sugar plantations—seared White fears into political acquiescence.⁴ Rio gave each zone in the country over to the control of its major landlords and slave masters sealed regional loyalty to the crown. No caste society in the Americas forgot the example of Haiti, where slaves rebelled and Blacks thereby acquired political control of the new nation in 1804.

In Latin America as a whole, the centralists wanted one national set of rules for all, with one major center of power. The federalists

wanted each province to have considerable autonomy from the national capital. In the first half of the century, centralists did not have the financial means to create strong, national governments, and liberals faced rural populations that saw themselves as Catholic and had little interest in liberal doctrines. As a result, conservatives gained power, but local leaders usually had considerable autonomy. The most centralized government of the early nineteenth century was that of Chile, where an alliance of landowners and merchants ran a conservative regime from 1833 to the 1860s, and where no federalism was allowed. Confusion evolves out of these two axes because there was no necessary link between a position along one axis and the other. Nor were political labels always clear. In most of the new nations, two parties emerged and could, for example, include centralists and federalists under a liberal label. Similarly, there were conservatives that were federalists or centralists. Even more confusingly, those in power tried to impose their will on the entire nation whatever their ideology. For example, Juan Manuel de Rosas began his federalist career in opposition to liberals who were called *Unitarios*; their federalism was so strong that they formed a confederation (not a nation) of the Rio de la Plata, and Rosas never claimed any title higher than that of Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires. He and his rancher allies seized power in that province in the civil war of 1828, and Rosas remained the dominant leader of the Argentine region until 1852. However, he used his control of the port of Buenos Aires (and the armed forces it could finance) to weaken his fellow federalists. They rebelled and joined with liberals to destroy his reign at the battle of Caseros; his rule, however, paved the way for a stronger state system after him.⁵

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the liberals succeeded in taking and holding office in a majority of the national capitals. The nation-states, however, remained highly fragmented. Liberals gained from the growth of export economies (those geared to selling abroad) and the ideological weaknesses of a conservatism inherited from the colonial era. However, power on the ground remained in the hands of local notables, making the nineteenth century the era of the caudillo and the local boss.

Hacendados and plantation owners kept private armies to control their labor forces and the areas around their estates. Frequently, they turned themselves into justices of the peace, claiming that their forces had state legitimacy. In Brazil, plantation owners usually assumed some military rank, a practice that became so common that

local bosses were known as *coronéis* into the late nineteenth century. In Mexico, they were called *caciques*; in Argentina, *caudillos*; and in Peru, *gamonales*. But the general principle was the same: those who controlled the land controlled the people and coupled their economic power with some political office.

There were extensive exceptions to this generalization of landlord rule that involved geographically isolated populations, often of mixed descent or of Native Americans. In major parts of Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, Native American populations governed themselves and in such numbers that they were able to resist simple incorporation into landlord rule. In all of these countries, Native Americans controlled towns and their hinterlands, and their central problem was that they often fought with each other. Still, they had the economic and political resources to evolve in their distinct cultures. Recent research indicates that early in the nineteenth century Native Americans in Peru even defended the possible return of Spanish rule and rebelled against the new republic in an attempt to defend their customs and the economic control of the coca trade.⁶ In Colombia, they often sided with conservative politicians—again to defend customs and *resguardos* (communal lands) of the colonial era.⁷ Several different arrangements existed between national and local governments, but national regimes rarely meddled in local politics, except to put down a provincial rebellion. Unfortunately, these were common. Impoverished national governments could not sustain the patronage required for political continuity. Bolivia fell into such disarray that some presidents lasted less than a year, one of them for only a day. Mexico collapsed into the colorful and disastrous career of General Antonio López de Santa Ana, who lost Texas in a civil war and half the territory of the nation in another war with the United States. Not all the countries, of course, fell into cycles of rebellion. Rosas has already been mentioned, though even he had to put down a liberal uprising in 1840. Most of Brazil's nineteenth century consisted of the reign of Dom Pedro II; from 1831 to 1840, the nation was under the aforementioned regency, and from 1840 until 1889, he was emperor.

It was once believed that political turmoil within Latin America led to economic stagnation; now generalizations about politics and economics are more nuanced. Regions of Mexico recovered quickly from the wars of independence; the Bolivian mining economy (silver and tin) continued to grow, for no president antagonized the

mine owners.⁸ Overall, the economies of Latin America grew. But the absence of political continuity and the early indebtedness of the new nations meant that political leaders found it difficult to organize public projects of national (or even regional) improvement. Here, the evolution of Chile is enlightening. The conservative regime was highly repressive but effective in creating legal continuity. As a result, the nation went through a series of export booms (silver, wheat, and copper) that fueled agrarian expansion; exports per capita in 1850 were nearly five times what they had been in 1800.⁹

Caudillismo lasted in many areas well into the nineteenth century and, in Central America, into the twentieth. Our image of caudillos is strongly colored by the Latin American writers, especially the Argentine Domingo Sarmiento, who believed in a simple formula: civilization was based in cities and barbarism in the countryside. Thus, Sarmiento's most famous work on Facundo Quiroga, a caudillo in the province of La Rioja, compares his gaucho followers to the Turks who once threatened Western civilization.¹⁰ More recent studies put this very differently: gauchos and their families followed caudillos out of necessity and religious sentiment, believing that liberals were the enemy of their faith. Caudillos rewarded them with wages, gifts, a sense of belonging, and the feeling that their provincial allegiances would protect them from outsiders. The source of their wild qualities, which Sarmiento dwelt on at some length, came from poverty and the harsh conditions on the South American plains.¹¹ Nor is it the case that gauchos frustrated economic progress. The Confederation of the Rio de la Plata expanded, economically and geographically, throughout the 1830s and 1840s, and when it did run into problems, these had nothing to do with the gauchos. As a social type, the cowboy existed throughout the Americas: he was called *vaquero* in northern Mexico and *charro* in most of the rest of the country, *huaso* in Chile, *gaucho* in Argentina and Uruguay, *gaúcho* in Brazil, and *llanero* in Venezuela. Far from being a drag on civilization, the cowboys were the labor backbone of ranching, and the frontiersmen who battled nomadic Native Americans. They endured into the early twentieth century in many areas, and as their importance and numbers declined, they, like their counterparts in the United States, became mythologized in these countries as symbols of masculinity and national fortitude.¹²

Caudillismo was more than just cowboy practices. It involved a political style, and most caudillos had charisma. They embodied machismo, were folk heroes, and were celebrated in popular song. In the late nineteenth century, liberal caudillos appear—they take part, for example, in Mexico's War of the Reform (1859–1861)—and come to power in Venezuela and Colombia so that *caudillaje* was hardly confined to backwardness. The problem of this style of government derived from its strength in a particular region and patterns of charisma; it was hard to turn a provincial following into the basis of a national government or to project a rurally based charisma into an urban political setting. The more urban Latin America became, the less it would need or want caudillos. But the pattern of strong-man rule would continue as a political heritage and that, unfortunately, could be urbanized.

Even during the era of caudillos, urban areas in many parts of Latin America continued to grow. As Table 1.2 demonstrates, some of them were substantial well before 1850. Mexico City, despite political instability, grew throughout the nineteenth century. Although the cities in Latin America were not growing as rapidly as the major centers of the North Atlantic, not a single one of them became smaller in 1850 than

TABLE 1.2 Major Cities in the Atlantic World, 1790–1890

<i>City</i>	<i>1790</i>	<i>1850</i>	<i>1890</i>
Bogotá	18,000	30,000	96,000
Buenos Aires	22,000	99,000	433,000
Guatemala City		37,000	72,000
Havana		2,000	28,000
Lima	53,000	70,000	101,000
London	675,000	2,605,000	5,638,000
Madrid	109,000	281,000	470,000
Mexico City	131,000	170,000	327,000
New York	33,000	696,000	2,507,000
Paris	576,000	1,053,000	2,448,000
Rio de Janeiro	29,000	166,000	523,000
São Paulo	8,000	15,000	65,000

Source: B.R. Mitchell, International, *Historical Statistics, 1750–1993. The Americas*, pp. 47–57; and *Europe*, pp. 74–76.

it had been in 1790, or failed to continue expanding into 1890. The most striking urban growth took place in a slave center, Rio de Janeiro, a sign of the impact of the coffee export economy through the century. Nonetheless, before 1880 these cities were dependent on human and animal labor for everything they produced, processed, and transported, and they were already notable for importing manufactures from Europe. Although conservative and rural cultures influenced and even controlled the capital cities of Latin America, they were generating the basis of liberal success. For one thing, it was only in the liberal capitals of the world that these cities would find the technology and the ideas to continue expanding. The faster the pace of urban growth, the stronger liberal cultural forces became.

There was a tendency toward creating one major urban center in each nation, and that center found ways to turn its needs into national projects. Thus, even capitals expanding under the rule of slave owners and caudillos questioned the cultural assumptions of conservative rule. By the late nineteenth century, the central political questions seemed to still involve a liberal-conservative axis, but they were turning more and more on the capacity or incapacity of expanding national capitals to impose rules on rural regions.

LABOR: INDIAN, SLAVE, AND FREE

As soon as the Europeans arrived in the Americas, they began to exploit the natives and import slaves from sub-Saharan Africa. This was as true of the French and the English as it was of the Spanish and Portuguese. The major difference in colonial zones was that there were many more natives in Meso-America and Spanish South America, and the Portuguese brought in many more slaves than any other European power. Native American slavery existed in Brazil; in Spanish South America the crown tried but failed to prevent it.¹³ The key factor in limiting Native American slavery in Spanish areas was that other servile forms of labor were cheaper. Natives suffered more from tributary systems than from enslavement. They were forced to pay set amounts to the crown and its officials, and the tribute varied widely in payments—from gold to cloth to foodstuffs. The early Spanish colonies also imposed the *encomienda* (a system in which natives within a particular zone given to the conqueror owed him their labor) and the *mita* (an adaptation of Incan tribute in which a

certain number of men were handed over to work, usually on roads or in the mines). In the eighteenth century, natives were forced to buy goods at prices demanded by those holding crown licenses to exploit this right. Black slavery also existed throughout Spanish America; slaves and their mixed-blood descendants were commonplace in the colonial capitals, the mines, and the plantations.

With tribute and slavery came racism. In the 1930s, a Brazilian sociologist—Gilberto Freyre, trained in the United States in the 1920s—went back to Brazil and began asserting that his nation had not been as cruel in its behavior toward slaves as the United States, and that the harshness of slavery had been softened by the Portuguese use of Black women for sex and as nannies.¹⁴ This theme became part of Brazil's national self-image. Indeed, by the 1950s Freyre's name became associated with the phrase "racial democracy," taught in Brazilian schools and widely believed. A North American specialist on Latin America, Frank Tannenbaum, also argued after World War II that racism had not been as exploitative in Brazil (and by implication, the rest of Latin America) as in the United States. He believed that the Catholic Church had often acted on behalf of slaves.¹⁵ Historical research has demonstrated, however, that little of this is true. Slave systems were no nicer in some areas than others; indeed, the technologies of buying slaves in Africa, shipping them to the colonies, and creating a slave market spread throughout European zones in the Americas. Miscegenation occurred in all slave zones; the control of slaves' sexuality was part of the entire labor system. The very term *Negro*, used in the United States, came from the word *negro*, which means black in Spanish and Portuguese. Everywhere, caste systems were created that declared white the ideal skin color and that defined Europeans as a distinct race, whose religion and rationality entitled them to rule over Native Americans and Blacks.¹⁶

The size and characteristics of colonial populations shaped the racial composition of nineteenth-century nations. In areas with substantial native populations, Whites exploited them first and turned to Black slavery as a secondary strategy. Natives required little outlay of capital, and slaves were expensive. In areas with fewer natives, populations were sometimes completely exterminated by overwork and disease. Then, only high-value commodities could finance the costs of slavery.¹⁷ The commodity most identified with African slavery was cane sugar. The development of sugar plantations throughout the Caribbean and Brazil accounts in large part for the density of the Black populations in

those areas today.¹⁸ In Haiti, slaves and free people gained independence from France in 1804, after a two-year war. Their victory, however, led to greater sugar production in the Spanish colony of Cuba and the expansion of slavery there in the mid-nineteenth century. In Brazil, *the* great importer of slaves in the Americas during the colonial era and the nineteenth century, slavery moved from the older sugar-producing zones of the northeast to the coffee areas in the southeast around Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In a tragedy that paralleled events in the development of cotton in the Southern United States, the coffee frontier offered new profits to slave masters and so refinanced a labor system that had become uneconomical in other nations. Mexico ended slavery early in its republican history, but many Latin American nations did not: it remained in Colombia until 1851, and in Peru and Venezuela until 1854. Cuba abolished it only after efforts at independence from Spain became enmeshed with a slave rebellion in a war that lasted from 1868 to 1878.

The external factor in ending slavery in the region was the rise of abolitionism. The abolitionist movement began among Quakers and spread to other Protestant faiths in Great Britain. Abolitionist sentiment ended the slave trade in the British colonies in 1807, and in 1833, Great Britain began to free Blacks in its most important sugar plantation colony, Jamaica—a task completed in 1838.¹⁹ The British then launched an abolitionist crusade in the Atlantic and used their navy to carry it out. France, the Netherlands, and Spain abolished the trade in their colonies between 1814 and 1820, although, as noted, this was not immediately enforced in Cuba. Unlike the slave population in the United States, which banned the importation of slaves in 1808, slave populations in Latin America never reproduced in numbers that would have extended slavery without continuing to import new victims from Africa. By the 1850s, British naval harassment of slave ships dramatically reduced the number of slaves coming each year to Cuba and Brazil. Then came the defeat of the most prosperous slavocracy in the world in 1865. The outcome of the U.S. Civil War meant that the most successful example of forced labor—the one practiced by the Southern planter class—had come to an end.

Although this defeat of American southerners is rarely discussed in the literature on Brazil, it certainly influenced the Cuban planter class, which realized that African slavery had no future. Even so, it took the ten years' war (1868–1878) to undercut the system in Cuba, which began to dismantle it in 1880; complete emancipation came only in

1886. Brazil became the last nation in the Americas to formally end the practice in 1888; the very next year, the Brazilian Empire, so closely tied to the existence of slavery, collapsed, and Brazil became a republic.²⁰ Unlike the Jamaican planters, those in Brazil and Cuba received nothing in return for the loss of their “property.”

The fate of native populations in the nineteenth century varied widely within Latin America, even within particular nations. Much depended on local as well as national policies and on the relation of specific populations to commodity markets. In many nations, there still existed extensive areas in which natives were free of any White control. In general, however, natives often gained greater control of their own affairs and resources in the early nineteenth century because of the weakness of central governments.

In Paraguay, the very unusual government of José Rodríguez Gaspar de Francia (1814–1840), who in 1820 assumed the title *El Supremo Dictador*, based its rule on the support of native peoples: he forced Whites to marry natives, thereby blurring the boundaries that established the latter as a distinctive caste, and tried to control contact and economic ties to other nations. He succeeded in breaking any control from the outside, reducing the influence of Brazil and of the Argentine and Uruguayan provinces in his country; so he can be said to have created a nation that might not have survived without his efforts.²¹ At the same time, he so terrorized the Whites and upper class and did so little to educate the natives that no civic life ever formed while he was alive. His efforts ended with his rule, but Paraguay remained a Native American nation in many ways, and even today it is officially bilingual, with Guaraní and Spanish.

Other nations with predominately native populations remained caste societies in which natives might have control of their own affairs but had little say in national or provincial governments. This was true of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Natives remained divided by different languages and by competition for resources, particularly land and water. Thus, Whites (and usually mestizos) had a set of racial attitudes and political policies toward natives, but natives as a whole did not have a uniform response to White impositions. They were repeatedly forced to act defensively, trying to hang on to lands and rights from the colonial era; and whenever they resorted to open rebellion, they usually suffered terrible retaliations.

Generalizations, however, must be carefully circumscribed. In many ways, we probably know more about Native American

societies in the colonial period than the nineteenth century. Mexico illustrates the enormous variety of situations among Whites, mestizos, and natives. In the north, in the states of Chihuahua and Sonora, Whites and mestizos waged a frontier war on tribes such as the Yaqui and Apache. Natives fought back tenaciously, and open warfare lasted until the late nineteenth century, when most native populations, aside from the Yaqui, were exterminated or reduced and brought under Mexican control.²² To the south of Mexico City, in the state of Oaxaca, a variety of Mixtec and Zapotec populations lived in complete peace with Mexican authorities; in fact, they had local political control in the form of municipal autonomy. Municipalities in this context were, of course, local pueblos and their rural environs. Natives traded extensively with one another and provided food and goods to Hispanicized trade routes as well. The natives of Oaxaca were an important political base to the liberal presidencies of Benito Juárez (1861–1863 and 1867–1872), who was born Zapotec but was educated by a Franciscan, and Porfirio Díaz (1876–1880 and 1880–1911), who had a strong Mixtec background. Neither came to think of himself as Native American, and each identified with the liberals of the United States and northern Europe. In the Yucatán peninsula, the Mayan populations lost their land and control of their own labor to the spread of commercial agriculture, especially to plantations cultivating sisal, used to produce rope and twine. Natives rose in a desperate caste war in 1847–1848, and when they were suppressed, they turned to the millennial vision of the “speaking cross,” which first appeared in 1851 and told them to keep fighting and that it would protect them from White bullets. The fighting resumed and continued into the early 1860s, until the Maya suffered such devastation that they gradually accepted White domination. The cult of the cross, however, endured.²³ No single national policy could cover all these situations, and national governments, aside from helping to suppress any native rebellion such as that of the Maya, left the treatment of natives to state governments and local authorities.

In the broad span of the nineteenth century, however, the natives lost ground, often literally, as liberal politicians legislated their communal lands away from them and awarded them to individual purchasers. Dr. Francia of Paraguay notwithstanding, most politicians—whether White, mestizo, or even Juárez himself—had little sympathy for native cultures and did little or nothing to protect or

extend native populations. Indeed, the best policy natives could hope for was to be left alone. As late as 1850, native communities controlling their own lands extended throughout Meso-America and the Andes. In Bolivia, they made up about half the total rural population of 1.2 million; landholding was broken into 5,000 haciendas and 4,000 free native communities.²⁴ To the extent that governments invested in education and rural development, these investments went to the expansion of Hispanic or Luso cultures. Many liberal politicians believed the “cure” for native societies was their Europeanization.

The vast majority of Latin American peoples were neither slave nor native. The miscegenation of the colonial era continued in the nineteenth century, creating by the end of that century mestizo and mulatto nations. Unlike in the United States, where someone having a small portion of African ancestry was labeled Negro, in Latin America, political and religious authorities created a myriad of racial labels. A population with so many labels is obviously preoccupied rather than indifferent to the relation of race to status. Once independence was established, many of the new republics—most notably Mexico, Costa Rica, and Chile—insisted that everyone was now a citizen and that colonial status no longer mattered, but in practice, the Church kept track of racial identities in its baptismal records.

Still, no one doubts that Latin American racial systems were different from those of the United States. Why did Latin American nations open a political and social space for free Blacks, mulattos, and mestizos that did not exist in the United States? We do know that the proportion of free Blacks and mulattos in Brazil was some two-fifths of the total rural population, a much higher percentage than the U.S. South. In 1840, a census counted a little over a million people in Cuba: 418,000 were labeled White; 436,000 were Black slaves; and close to 150,000 were something else.²⁵ *White* was an expansive term in Cuba, and most people of mixed heritage and lighter skin claimed it.

The best hypothesis about the differences in race relations between the United States and Latin America, although it has been sharply debated, is that of Carl Degler, who in studying racial systems in the United States and Brazil noted that any slave system needed a free population that would help the master class carry out all the other tasks that slaves could not perform. In the U.S. South, Whites were so numerous that they could perform these intermediary jobs; in Brazil, the White population was not large enough, and the master

class needed free Blacks and mulattos to serve as their allies in controlling the slave population.²⁶

Recent studies of Brazilian slavery point out something that is equally important in explaining racial and abolitionist attitudes: people of relatively modest means often owned slaves. Thus, the slave-owning class included Blacks and mulattos who were not rich. Zephyr Frank has documented the life of Antonio José Dutra, who was himself enslaved and freed as a young man, and who came to own others before dying in 1849. Frank concludes that of all the ironies about urban slavery, “foremost is the fact that slavery was both a horrible institution built on exploitation and coercion and a powerful avenue for social advancement.”²⁷

Manumission (setting slaves free) was much more common in Brazilian and Spanish American slave systems than in that of the United States. So was the practice of allowing urban slaves to earn money and buy their freedom and that of their relatives (including their spouses and children). All this must be put on one side, however. On the other are such facts as the higher mortality rate due to poor diets in Brazil and Cuba, and the male-female ratio, which so favored the importation of males that Blacks as a whole declined in numbers in slave zones. Slavery was a dehumanizing experience in every zone it was practiced, but historians have demonstrated that no social institution, not even slavery, can function only on the basis of coercion—there must be labor incentives as well.²⁸ So slavery’s legacy includes a complex pattern of narrow racial distinctions. People of color who were the objects of discrimination by the ruling class had status groupings within and among themselves and never saw themselves as belonging to one group.

The mestizo served a related role in Native American nations to that of mulattos and freed Blacks in slave zones. In Mexico, on the eve of independence, natives probably made up three-fifths of the population, but mestizos were the majority of the population by the end of the nineteenth century. This *mestizaje* would become central in the early twentieth century to a reimagining of the racial past in such countries as Mexico, Nicaragua, and Chile. Here, however, it is important to note a major difference between native and slave nations. Slaves never owned land or had their own local governments unless they lived as runaways. They had no collective resources that could be taken. Natives, however, did and still controlled extensive areas in the nineteenth century. Mestizos (often

called *ladinos* in many areas) lined up generally with Whites and developed a common racial interest in despoiling natives of their lands. A study of natives in Veracruz, by Emilio Kourí, demonstrates that as native lands were divided into parcels by liberal legislation, some Native Americans joined a commercial class in exploiting natives.²⁹ The expansion of the mestizo population, like that of the White, came at the expense of natives. Thus, the rise of the mestizo was a major factor in further dooming Native Americans, even as mestizos began to extol their Amerindian descent.

The last element to consider in evaluating Latin American racial systems was their code of honor. This code, developed in Europe over centuries, had been transposed to the Americas during the colonial era and remained an essential element of Latin American societies throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. It considered gender, race, and income. As the Brazilians put it so neatly, “money whitens.” The scale of honor and virtue paralleled the racial scales in the New World. White, educated people had honor, and dark-skinned, poor people did not (or they had very little). In Mexico, even today, to call someone an *indio* is a profound insult and, among men, likely to lead to a fight. The insulting term for a mulatto in northeast Brazil is *goat*, after the varied spots of that animal. A woman who remained in the home and had sex only with one man and within the framework of marriage had honor; a woman who had sex out of the bonds of matrimony did not. Men of the household were supposed to protect the sexual virtue and physical safety of women; husbands or brothers who failed to do so were disgraced along with the entire household. To protect his honor, a man might beat his wife or, if she betrayed him sexually, even kill her and fear little legal reprisal.³⁰ In this sexual double standard, a woman was supposed to accept her husband visiting prostitutes or having another lover. She had grounds for divorce only if he abandoned her. Men who were challenged on their opinions in politics or culture were also challenged in their honor; duels remained common in many Latin American cities through most of the nineteenth century and occurred occasionally after 1900.

The honor code and racial attitudes pervaded all social strata. They created emotional bonds and social dichotomies; liberals as well as conservatives subscribed to them. As factions elaborated their goals, they incorporated these dichotomies into national politics—civilized–barbaric, white–non-White, rational–ignorant,

urban–rural, men–women—to which the liberals would add scientific–superstitious. Within these associative terms, it became easy to stigmatize the majority of the population. Manual labor was seen as demeaning, something that non-Whites did. Educated Chileans looked at the poor working people and referred to them as *rotos*, “broken ones.” For a woman to work outside the home—something many women had to do—was a disgrace; working women were automatically assumed to be engaging in casual prostitution or promiscuity.

Workers had few if any rights. Whereas the United States in the nineteenth century encouraged homesteading and created a middling class of rural property owners, Latin America had collections of peones. People who played roles comparable to that of American homesteaders in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico could often not secure the rights to the land that they had cleared. Brazil, in 1850, actually curtailed the landowning rights of settlers or squatters. In Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, governments preferred to subsidize European immigration rather than helping their mixed-blood populations. Sarmiento and others thought the natives had to be exterminated—and by implication the nativeness removed from the nation—if a “new man” was to develop. A vicious cycle became accentuated in which the poor were considered barbaric, unworthy of public action, and fit for exploitation. As nations developed and poverty became more extensive, Latin America became more “backward” in relation to the northern United States and Western Europe.

In law, most Latin Americans were free. At independence, substantial islands of free Blacks, mulattos, and mestizos existed. One would never know the importance of Blacks in many countries to read their national histories. Who were these free people and what type of life was available to them? We have travelers’ accounts and the reports of government officials, but these have obvious biases. Historians have begun exploring rural social complexities of this era only in the last two decades.

People were deeply religious, just as they had been in the colonial period. These feelings were not just a matter of Church teachings, but of community and inner beliefs that governed all social life. Parents named their children after saints, and people gathered in a community for specific religious festivals, especially for the patron saint of the town. Within small towns, lay associations were essential to social life; one of the most common was the *cofradía*

(brotherhood), dedicated to the veneration of a saint, of the Virgin Mary (usually in one of her apparitions), or of Jesus Christ.³¹ The local priest and the elders of communities often quarreled over the control of religious images and the money gathered from festivals and devotions. Even communities aligned with liberal leaders believed in God and life after death. Ordinary people believed in miracles and visions, and created entire social movements around apparitions that had just occurred.³² At the level of communities, the faith was not just maintained but reinvented. The example of the Maya and the speaking cross has been mentioned, but most miracles did not call for a social rebellion so much as a new pilgrimage and a new chapel. Trips to these sites made up a tourism that helped finance particular towns.

Although a folk Catholicism was triumphant, a closer look at regions reveals many practices that the official Church never accepted. In many parts of Latin America, priests were so scarce that lay preachers—sometimes illiterate or semiliterate—led believers. Nominally Catholic societies continued practices from the pre-Colombian or African pasts. At times, these became entirely different religions. *Santería* and *candomblé* are respectively the Hispanic and Brazilian versions of fundamentally African beliefs. In *candomblé*, whose later forms include *macumba* and *umbanda* (its contemporary urban version), Brazilian slaves took over their own spirituality. The focus of the religion was obviously not the afterlife but this one, and the central events involved rituals of drums, dancing, and possession. It is in these rituals—often led by women and which involved trance states signaling a “saint” had entered that person—that the believers communed with spirits. African-derived music, often originating in these religious sessions, is a key element in most of Latin America’s famous dances. A belief in possession ran well outside of African populations. Native Americans and their descendents had their own versions. In these communal practices, ritual prayers were an essential part of healing (along with herbs). Thus, societies were nucleated around local amalgams of folk beliefs, bossism, and trade, and the dominant attitudes strongly reflected regional and ethnic affinities rather than having much to do with nation-states.

The majority of people found ways to enjoy their lives somewhat. They had religious festivals or patriotic holidays, with the latter becoming more important as the century wore on. In Mexico, the

Day of the Dead is still celebrated and is not a mournful affair, but one in which children eat sugared skulls, and families visit their dead and share a meal with them. The festivals called for colorful costumes. It would take a lengthy catalog to list just the forms of dancing and singing that existed in Mexico, let alone the rest of the region. There were no national dances or songs; these are conventions invented in the twentieth century. The guitar and brass instruments brought from Europe in the colonial period had long since joined native and African rhythm instruments. Just about any small town had its own band. The folk song was ubiquitous and an important source of news. From Mexico to Brazil to Chile, people loved to make up ballads about bandits and love affairs, and to ridicule politicians. They had puppet shows and, in the larger towns, concerts of local musicians and in the larger cities, theaters. A great deal of social entertaining occurred in people's homes. Educated young women were expected, just as they were in Europe, to play the guitar or piano and to sing nicely. And, in an era when gossip still reigned, most politics was gossip, a gathering of friends in taverns or at a house party. Gambling was an essential male pastime. There were card games, cock fights, dog fights, and horse races. Bullfights, especially involving men on horses lancing the bull, existed throughout Spanish America.

The production of food as well as trade in food and basic cloth were the centerpieces of almost every local economy. Most food was locally produced and consumed, but there were important commercial items, such as teas and tobacco, that crossed substantial distances and even national borders, but these were few. The rise of the export economies began in the nineteenth century, but such items as sugar, coffee, wheat, sisal, and hides did not occupy the majority of the population even after 1880. Commercial life based on money, an essential component of export economies and the modernization of agriculture, played only a minor role in local life because most people had little currency and traded in goods rather than in cash. The evolution of Latin America's foods has never been properly recounted. Mexico alone had more than 300 varieties of peppers and numerous local cuisines, distinguished by differences in geography and native ethnicities. On a day-to-day basis, people relied on basic staples: corn tortillas and beans with some peppers in Mexico, beans and rice in Brazil, stews and soups everywhere. Meat, outside of cattle zones, was scarce and expensive. But just as every region had its political climate and its religious peculiarities,

every region had also its delicacies. The most profound new influence on diets was the spread of French cooking from major cities to the countryside. Alcoholism was widespread (as it was in Europe and the United States). Selling liquor, made of cheap rum from sugar cane or brandies from common fruits, was a source of income for hacendados. Home brews used everything from corn to potatoes to cactus sap. The production of beer began in the mid-nineteenth century, as Germans came to the region, fleeing the politics in their homeland.

Although rural populations were often isolated from national politics and the cultural changes occurring in the cities, knowledge of political alignments and the laws affecting the poor was widespread. One could make the case, as Carlos A. Forment has done, that at the local level Mexicans, for example, had numerous associations: religious confraternities, Masonic and political clubs, guilds, and commercial societies. As Forment admits, these were divided by race and class, and they were geographically fragmented.³³ In sharp contrast to views a generation ago, we know that communities of even poor natives were not politically passive. When conditions permitted, as happened in the 1820s and 1830s in Mexico, poor mestizos and natives voted and sponsored local political movements.³⁴ In Colombia, in the 1840s, free Black men joined with mixed bloods and formed democratic societies, demanding the establishment of liberal, civil rights and the distribution of lands, before being suppressed in the 1880s.³⁵ Communities responded to legal changes and often petitioned their helpless national governments. Most of the population was illiterate, but the few could read to the many, and by mid-century most towns of any size had a newspaper, even if it was published irregularly. Sermons also provided news of social events and politics. The illiterate used scribes to write each other and officials.

After the 1840s, however, interactions between rural populations and national governments became more common. The law was beginning to matter. Given the distribution of landholding, many people lived by shuffling around from estate to estate, engaging in plantings and harvests, or adding to their subsistence by working in the mines or the estates for periods of time. Landowners now invoked the law to control their movements. As agricultural markets expanded, landowners called on the government to ban "vagrancy."³⁶ New statutes fined natives and cowboys in Spanish America for moving around without a permit or passport, or for not having a visible means of support. Those fined could pay what they

owed to the government by working it off—governments began to sell their labor to landowners. Free men were now legally obligated and controlled; the vagrancy statutes were crucial to Guatemalan coffee growers and Argentine cattle barons.³⁷ Another tactic was to contract with a laborer by advancing him funds to work a tract of land or mine a piece of ground. Variations on such contracts had existed in the colonial era. Once contracted, the interest would accumulate or the worker would not earn enough to pay off the debt, thus becoming an indebted peon. A classic example is that of the mestizos called *peones acasillados*, peasants tied to the land, on Mexican estates; and another occurs in Chile, where *inquilinos*, tenant farmers, were expected to supply the big house with the servant labor of their wives and children for no additional wages.³⁸ To increase their profits, mines and estates ran company stores where they monopolized supplies and sold their employees liquor. It was in these interstices between subsistence farming and labor legislation that regional bosses began to demand support from their national governments. The law was an essential instrument of emerging national elites—that is, the oligarchies. Through national law and their continued importance to local markets, they would retain control of labor and consolidate their chances for even larger fortunes.

THE ORIGINS OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

On paper, Latin America—with the exception of Cuba and Puerto Rico, which remained colonies until 1898—was governed by constitutional law. The empire of Brazil had a constitution. Political practice, however, was strongly shaped by the religious, racial, and gender assumptions inherited from the colonial era. The idea of constitutional law grew out of the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions. As Thomas Jefferson put the definition of liberal democracy so well in America's Declaration of Independence, it assumed that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights," and that to secure these rights "Governments are instituted among Men."

Latin Americans were trapped in a legal and historical dilemma with far-reaching consequences for their development. Although their constitutions generally proclaimed the ideals of the Enlighten-

ment, their societies proclaimed other values that directly contradicted the basis of constitutional rights. No one in Latin America, including the liberals, believed that all men were created equal. (One might say that because Jefferson owned slaves all his life, neither did he. But he certainly believed that most White people should have legal rights, and that no democratic republic could exist without them.) Those who gained political power in the new Latin American states, whether liberal or conservative, did not feel bound by the rights of others or by democratic procedures. Everything in their cultures—the appearance of military cliques, the acceptance of social hierarchies embodied in Catholic doctrine, the importance of racial distinctions, and the weaknesses of local governments—argued against it.

Conservatives who wanted to retain colonial religious and social practices lost ideological ground to the liberal attack. If the liberals could never realize their ideas in illiberal societies, the conservatives faced the problem of making rules behind the façade of constitutional republics. For one thing, outside of the Brazilian Empire, they could no longer create an aristocracy. They were stuck with the republican and constitutional idea of the citizen. They resorted to some of the legal tactics that have parallels in the United States but with the important distinction that different ratios among the races which created very different political outcomes. Slaves could not be citizens in either the United States or Latin America, and in most Latin American societies, neither could natives. In a moment of liberal enthusiasm in the 1820s, Mexico had not only abolished slavery but declared that natives no longer legally existed; everyone was now a citizen. In most nations, however, racial exclusions operated, and those in office could manipulate the suffrage to keep some citizens from voting. Everywhere in the Americas, women were denied the vote (as they were in the electoral systems in Europe). Adult male suffrage was restricted by property ownership or income, and literacy. Curiously, one of the most racially stratified nations, Brazil, had throughout the era of the empire widespread male suffrage. A large army of smallholders could vote under the 1824 Constitution. This, however, made little difference to political outcomes because smallholders were economically dependent on the owners of plantations, who expected political loyalty in return for small favors. Once slaves were freed, the nation invested heavily in prisons to contain any social threat.