

The Consolidation of Latin America Summary

From Colonies to Nations. By the late eighteenth century, Creole elites questioned the necessity of remaining colonial subjects. The mass of the population resented government policies. Early attempts at revolution failed because the elites feared the potential power of those under them.

Causes of Political Change. Four external events had a major effect on Latin American political thought. The American Revolution provided a model for colonial rebellion. The French Revolution offered revolutionary ideology, but it was rejected by elites as too radical politically and socially. The slave rebellion on the French island of St. Domingue led by François-Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture in 1791 ended in 1804 with the independent republic of Haiti. The success of the slaves frightened colonial elites and made them even more cautious about social change. The final and precipitating factor was the confused political situation in Spain and Portugal caused by French invasion and occupation. In Spain, the French deposed the king in favor of Napoleon's brother but then had to face prolonged civil war. Latin American Creoles declared loyalty to the Spanish ruler but began to rule the colonies themselves.

Spanish American Independence Struggles. In Mexico, a Creole conspiracy caused Miguel de Hidalgo to appeal in 1810 to Indians and mestizos for support. After early victories, Hidalgo lost Creole support and was executed. The revolution continued and conservative Creoles under Agustín Iturbide won independence. The new state, a monarchy based on Creole dominance, collapsed in 1824. Mexico became a republic, and Central America, until then part of the empire, divided into independent nations. In northern South America, an independence movement led by a Creole officer, Simon Bolívar, began in Caracas in 1810. Between 1817 and 1822, he won victories in Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. The three countries were united as Gran Colombia until political differences in 1830 caused separation. In southern South America, rebellion began in Rio de la Plata under the leadership of José de San Martín. Buenos Aires opted for autonomy in 1810. In 1816, the independence of the United Republic of Rio de la Plata was proclaimed. Paraguay separated from it in 1813. The remaining Spanish territories fell to San Martín's forces; by 1825 all of Spanish America had won political independence. All were republics with representative governments.

Brazilian Independence. By the end of the eighteenth century, Brazil was Portugal's most important colonial possession. The presence of a large slave population tempered the elite's thoughts of independence. The French invasion of Portugal in 1807 led the royal family and many of the nobility to flee to Brazil. Rio de Janeiro became the real capital of the Portuguese empire. Brazil's ports were opened to world commerce because of pressure from Britain, Portugal's powerful wartime ally. King João VI remained in Brazil until 1820. The presence of the court made Rio de Janeiro into a great capital city. When João VI returned to Portugal to deal with a liberal revolution, he left his son Pedro as regent. When it became clear that Brazil was to return to colonial status, Pedro declared its independence in 1822 and became the constitutional emperor, Pedro I. Independent Brazil maintained the existing social order based on slavery.

New Nations Confront Old and New Problems. Many of the leaders of Latin American

independence shared Enlightenment political and economic ideals. There was less agreement about the role of the Catholic Church as the exclusive state religion. Some leaders had egalitarian beliefs. Slavery was abolished in all the former Spanish colonies by 1854. Better treatment of Indians and mestizos was blocked by the elite's fears of losing tax revenue and control. Property and literacy qualifications limited voting; women remained subordinate to men.

Political Fragmentation. Early efforts for political unity quickly failed because of regional rivalries and internal frictions. The great size of the Spanish colonial world and its poor transportation systems gave the eighteen new nations a local focus. The great majority of their peoples were outside of the political process.

Caudillos, Politics, and the Church. The new nations suffered from the warfare, ending in independence. Armies loyal to their leaders led to the rise of caudillos, men who controlled local areas. They intervened in national politics to make and unmake governments. At times, the caudillos defended the interests of regional elites—or of Indians and peasants. In general, they disregarded representative forms and the rule of law. There were many differences among leaders about the forms of republican government. Centralists wanted strong governments with broad powers, while federalists favored awarding authority to regional governments. Liberals, influenced by the French and United States models, stressed individual rights, opposed the corporate structure of colonial society, and favored a federalist government. Conservatives wanted a centralized state and wished to maintain a society where corporate groups ruled social action. The role of the church became a critical political issue. Liberals sought to limit its civil role but met strong opposition from conservatives and the papacy. The political parties that formed were led by landowners and the urban middle class; they argued about liberal or conservative ideas but shared basic class loyalties. The rest of the population was not concerned with political ideology. The result was enduring political instability, with rapid turnovers of rulers and constitutions. Only a few nations had general stability: Chile after reforms of its system in 1833, and the Brazilian monarchy. For most of Latin America, the basic questions of government and society remained unresolved.

Latin American Economies and World Markets, 1820-1870. After the defeat of Napoleon, any plans for ending Latin American independence were thwarted by the opposition of Britain and the United States. The price for British support was freedom of trade. Britain replaced Spain as a dominant economic force in a type of neocolonial commercial system. It became a major consumer of Latin American products and sold its manufactured goods to the new nations. The free entry and export of goods benefited port cities and landowners, but it damaged regional industries producing for internal markets. The resulting dependency on foreign markets reinforced the old order, which made land the basis of wealth and prestige.

Mid-Century Stagnation. The Latin American economy was stagnant between 1820 and 1850. The mining sector had suffered from the independence wars, transportation and port facilities remained underdeveloped, and investment capital was lacking. The situation changed after 1850 when European market expansion created demand for local products. The export of coffee, hides, beef, minerals, grains, and guano brought revenues to governments, urban growth, and transportation improvements. Liberal reformers during the 1820s and 1830s attempted to break

colonial patterns and follow European trends. Latin American societies were not ready for many of the reforms; the conservative weight of the church, landowners, and army remained potent. They returned to power by the 1840s and halted or hindered reform. An alliance between them and peasantry emerged to oppose change.

Economic Resurgence and Liberal Politics. Liberals returned to power during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They based their policies on the positivism of Auguste Comte, stressing a scientific approach to social problems. The shift was caused by changes in the nature of the Industrial Revolution and the age of imperialism. Latin American economies expanded rapidly after 1850 and the population doubled. There were new demands for Latin American products, and foreign entrepreneurs and bankers joined liberals, landowners, and merchants to tie Latin America to the capitalist expansion of the Western economy. The new political leaders were inspired by the example of western Europe and the United States, but their distrust of their mass populations prevented the success of many efforts. Economic growth often occurred at the expense of the peasantry; landowners and governments expropriated land and developed forms of tenancy, peonage, and disguised servitude.

Mexico: Instability and Foreign Intervention. The 1824 Mexican constitution was a federalist document that established a republic and guaranteed basic civil rights. But it did not address the serious issues of inequitable distribution of land, the status of Indians, the problems of education, or the poverty of most of the population. Conservative centralists opposed liberal federalists; foreign commercial agents added additional complications. Liberals during the early 1830s tried sweeping reforms, but they fell before a conservative reaction led by Antonio López de Santa Ana. He was a typical caudillo, and the defects of the regime drew foreign intervention by Spain and France. War with the United States ended in Mexican defeat and the loss of about one half of its territory. The war left a bitter distrust of the United States and caused a serious loss of Mexican economic potential. Politicians were stimulated to confront their nation's internal problems, which had contributed to defeat. Indian lawyer Benito Juárez led a liberal revolt in 1854 and inaugurated a new constitution in 1857. Military and church privileges were curtailed, and church and Indian communal lands were sold to individuals. Speculators, however, bought the land and left peasants and Indians poorer than they had been previously. Conservative reaction led to civil war and the summoning of French assistance. The French placed Maximilian von Habsburg on the throne, but Juárez refused to accept the foreign ruler. When the French withdrew in 1867, Maximilian was captured and executed. Juárez regained office to lead an autocratic regime until his death in 1872. By 1880, Mexico was about to enter a period of strong central government and political stability.

Argentina: The Port and the Nation. The economy of Argentina was divided between the commercial port of Buenos Aires and pampas of the surrounding territories. The United Republic of Rio de la Plata declared independence in 1816 but did not long stay together. Liberal efforts to create a strong central government provoked a federalist reaction that gained power in 1831 under Juan Manuel de Rosas. A weak central government and local autonomy followed that favored the merchants of Buenos Aires and the surrounding ranchers. Campaigns against Indians opened new lands in the South. Rosas ruled in a populist, authoritarian manner and exiled his opponents. Liberals and regional caudillos joined to overthrow Rosas in 1852. After a confused decade of

political turmoil, opponents compromised to create a unified republic. Between 1862 and 1890, Domingo F. Sarmiento and other able leaders initiated wide political and economic reforms. Political stability brought foreign investment; a great boost in exports brought prosperity. The population tripled as many European immigrants came to take advantage of the good times. Increased revenues allowed infrastructure development. National unity and pride grew after a successful war against Paraguay and the defeat of the southern Indians.

The Brazilian Empire. Many problems were present behind Brazil's facade of nineteenth-century political stability. Pedro I issued a liberal constitution in 1824 but still acted as an autocrat. He was forced to abdicate in 1831; regents then ran the country in the name of his young son Pedro II, who came to power in 1840, in what really was an experiment in republican government. Internal disputes between liberals and conservatives were complicated by arguments for and against the monarchy. Provinces opposed centralized rule, and many unsuccessful regional revolts ensued. The development of coffee as an export crop brought economic resurgence. There was an intensification of slavery until 1850. Prosperity continued after 1850 along with political tranquility. The communication and transport systems improved; foreign investment increased. New political currents included the growth of urban and middle-class groups less tied to landholding and slavery and the arrival of thousands of European immigrants who reduced dependence on slaves. The abolitionist movement gained strength, and slaves increasingly resisted. Slavery was abolished in 1888. Support for the monarchy waned. A long war against Paraguay brought the military into politics, but quarrels with the church drew them into opposition. Planters turned away from slavery to positivist ideas. The Republican Party, formed in 1871, won wide support, and a coup replaced the monarchy with a republic in 1889. Social and political problems caused by modernization remained unresolved.

Societies in Search of Themselves. Tension remained in cultural life between European and American influences and between the elite and the common folk. Social change for the masses and for women came slowly.

Cultural Expression after Independence. Independence opened up Latin America to direct influence from other European nations. The elite followed Europe's examples in intellectual and artistic life. In the 1830s, Romanticism became important and turned interest to Indians and local customs. By the 1870s, the focus changed; a new realism came to the arts and literature along with the ideas of positivism. Mass culture was not affected by elite trends; traditional forms flourished but were ignored by most of the elite.

Old Patterns of Gender, Class, and Race. Women, despite participation in the revolutions, gained little ground during the nineteenth century. They continued as wives and mothers under the authority of men; they could not vote or hold office. Lower-class women had more economic and personal freedom but otherwise shared in subordination. Public education became more open to women to prepare them for more enlightened roles in the home. New occupational opportunities opened for women in teaching. Educated women, by the end of the century, actively demanded increased rights. Most of the new nations legally ended the society of castes in which status depended on color and ethnicity. In reality, very little changed for Indians and former slaves. The

expansion of the export economy in many ways intensified old patterns. Personal liberties were sacrificed to economic growth. Control of land, politics, and the economy was dominated by a small, white, Creole elite. Latin America entered the 1880s as a predominantly agrarian group of nations with rigid social structures and were dependent on the world market.

In Depth: Explaining Underdevelopment. Latin America, because of its early winning of independence and entry into the world economy, provides a useful example for study of the problems faced by underdeveloped nations. Their experience grew from the influences of their Hispanic cultural heritage. When independence came, the European models of economy, law, and government that were adopted failed to bring either prosperity or social harmony. In the search for alternative policies, some condemned the Hispanic legacy; others turned to Marxism. Latin Americans often compared their experiences with those of the United States. Answers for the questions increasingly were sought in analyses of a world economic and political system. They turned to modernization theory, a following of the path taken in western Europe. Refinements of the theories led to an acceptance of dependency theory that envisaged development and underdevelopment as part of the same process. The process of theorizing continues.

The Great Boom, 1880-1920. The increasing demand in industrializing Europe stimulated Latin American economic growth. Liberal ideology—individual freedom, open markets, limited government intervention in the economy—prepared the way for expansion. The ideology was adopted by the small urban middle class, landholders, miners, and export merchants. These groups forged political alliances to direct governments in their favor at the expense of the peasants and working class. Export products fueled the expansion and provided resources for imports of foreign manufactured goods and local development projects. It was always a risky business, since market prices depended on outside conditions. The developing commerce drew the interest of foreign investors. Germany and the United States joined Britain as major participants. The capital brought in was useful, but it placed key industries under foreign control, and it influenced the internal and external policies of governments.

Mexico and Argentina: Examples of Economic Transformation. In Mexico in 1876, Porfirio Díaz was elected president; he dominated politics for 35 years. Díaz imposed a strong central government and used foreign capital for internal infrastructure development and industrialization. His administration subverted liberal democratic principles to preserve power and continue modernization. Opposition was suppressed, and growth occurred at the expense of the peasantry and working class. When strikes and unrest increased, a national police force and the army kept order. Regional political bosses rigged elections in support of the regime. By 1910, a middle-class reform movement emerged and sought electoral reform. Other opposition groups joined it, and a bloody ten-year civil war followed. In Argentina, another path of economic expansion was followed. Buenos Aires and the rest of the nation worked together after 1880 to bring expansion and stability. Technological change, especially refrigerated ships for exporting meat, helped the process; labor came from a flood of immigrants. By 1914, one third of the population was foreign-born. They fused their various European identities into a distinct culture. Workers wanted political expression, and in the 1890s, a socialist party formed. Strikes and government repression marked the decade after 1910. The Argentinean oligarchy attempted some reforms. A party representing the

emerging middle class, the Radical Party, took shape. Aided by the reforms of an electoral law of 1912, it came to power in 1916. When it met labor unrest, the party was as repressive as its predecessors. Similar patterns occurred in the economic and political life of the rest of Latin America. Ruling oligarchies of the traditional aristocracies allied with the middle classes faced rising labor and rural unrest and rebellion.

Uncle Sam Goes South. American political and economic interest in Latin America grew after the Civil War. The Spanish-American War of 1898 brought the United States directly into Latin American affairs. American investment in Cuba predated the war, and following it the door was open for direct involvement in the Caribbean. Cuba became an American economic dependent, and Puerto Rico was annexed. When Colombia was reluctant to meet American proposals for building the Panama Canal, the United States backed a revolution in Panama and gained exclusive rights over the canal. Latin Americans, as a consequence, became very suspicious of the expansionist United States.

Global Connections: New Latin American Nations and the World. Despite all of the economic, social, and political changes occurring in Latin America after independence, its countries remained remarkably unchanged. Revolutions and reforms made few, if any, real changes. To some extent, Latin America ran against the currents of global history in the nineteenth century. In the age of imperialism it cast off colonial control. In this sense, Latin America was a bit more isolated from the rest of the world. Efforts to emulate the West did occur. Intervention from the United States was another outside force.