**Lasting Colonial Legacy in Independent Latin America**

Latin America has a very rich and emotionally taxing history. From the beginning, unbelievably powerful empires ruled over large portions of the lands and utilized technologies that were, in some cases, not matched again for hundreds of years. This bright history of these empires was essentially erased from the map with the invasion of Spain. This new land –Colonial Latin America, went through numerous political, economic, religious, and social changes, but has it really changed that much now that they are reaching a time of independence? This question can only be succinctly answered by looking at the civilization from a social, political and religious, and economic standpoint.

Although Latin America may seem immensely advanced over its prior self by the time a revolution is sparked, I don’t believe that the root of the problem has changed all that much. Socially, much advancement toward “equality” has been made. The Indians were considered people prior, and though that maintains its position through the independence, it doesn’t necessarily make them equals. In addition, slavery is still rampant, though not in the sense that it was during the early settlement. The slaves are still not seen as even equal to the Indians, even during this time of advancement. Even through this time it is blatantly apparent that there is a caste system in place and the whites (specifically white Europeans) still have a stronghold on the top of the metaphorical social ladder. This system not only has implications on social status and rules, but it will have an obvious effect on the distribution of wealth as will be seen when looking at economic advancement. This societal hierarchy is a key factor that points to a deep rooted colonial legacy, and I don’t see it going away any time soon!

Religiously and Politically, Latin America has come a very long way since its early days. As we have discussed numerous times in class, during the early days the Church was a very powerful institution, owning a majority of the wealth in Latin America. This was not so much a problem as the views of the Church were directly in line with the government’s goals. This is not so much the same case anymore. Just before the independence from Europe, the Bourbon reforms began to change this stance. The government is now looking for additional money, and what better place to get it than the Church. This definitely burned bridges and caused a stir on a higher level, but the system taken to gain the wealth also had a direct negative impact on societies poor, also to be discussed with the economy.

The Bourbon reforms marked a new religious era, and this could be argued as a destruction of Colonial roots, or a partial dismantling of them. Due to the government wanting money from the church, they are no longer in favor of the religious sector being an equal with the government. This meant that the Church would be forced to give up power. The independence also marked a period of time where people were second guessing the Church, thus causing it to lose a significant amount of power and money. The reduction in Church influence does not by any means mark an end to Christianity (as it is still a primary religion in the Americas today), but it does allow one to reminisce on patterns in the past. When one group gains power, another must lose it. In the end, with the gain of power in government the Church loses power. This can be seen in early colonial times where the new Spanish settlers gain more power by dismantling the indigenous religions. Although it is not a direct indicator of a strong colonial legacy, I believe that this simple shift of power is a result of the Latin American past first pushing a religious takeover and then shifting to monetary priorities at a later time.

Finally, in my opinion, we reach the discussion on economy. I believe this is the most definitive display of strong Colonial Roots that is visible. Not only does a repeating pattern of wealth inequality and power remain visible through the early years, but it also holds true through the independence and even to this day. Latin America is one of the top countries in the world for extreme wealth inequality. This is due to each of the reasons discussed above, in addition to the way the government is run before and after the independence. With the partial loss of power of the Church and implementation of new policies, the poor remained poor, while the wealthy were becoming even richer. The poor were essentially being robbed of what little they had left while the wealthy were being taxed a minimal amount and reaping the benefits of the system. This system is beginning to break down to a degree entering into the era of independence, but it never truly dissolves.

To better look at the economic implications of the social hierarchy, we need to understand how the system was set up. Due to the structure of the tax system the rich were being taxed less compared to the poor. This would allow the wealth gap to grow bigger as time goes on, locking people in their respective social standings. Although the independence marked a disconnect between Europe and Latin America, the government was still operating in much the same way. As discussed, the independence broke Latin America off from direct European control; the only problem is that much of the European influence was still being felt. This was caused by the fact that European decedents were still in power. This is in my opinion, the number one indicator of a strong Colonial Legacy. Although Spain was progressing, the new world wanted to remain the same, and the European influence in government was a partial driving force in why that ended up being the case. Even after new powers and revolts, this structure is not completely wiped out. Finally, on the bright side, the economy was able to vastly expand and bring some light to the darkness. The independence also marked a time of great change in trade. New routes opened up on the seas bringing new opportunities and wealth and could potentially begin to lessen the internal struggle the people were encountering. From the first colonization of the Americas, the trade routes were locked down and very limited not allowing other countries to trade at the ports. If this continued, it could have been potentially devastating in the long run due to the lack of money in the Americas. In the end though, the additional money brought in with the new trade opportunities could provide the government with the money they were looking for. Because of the new revenue, I believe it is safe to say that one of the core goals of the Colonial Legacy –bringing more money in, has been preserved.

All in all I believe that the Colonial Legacy of Latin America has been preserved in the end due to the original goals of spreading Christianity and bringing in wealth. Although much has changed from a religious, economic, social, and political standpoint, many of the core values of the early Colonial days have been preserved; they are just displayed with a new face.