


## Latin America: The Colonial System By 1800

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Using the arrow buttons in the upper right hand corner of the activity, flip through the book to explore colonial life in Latin America.

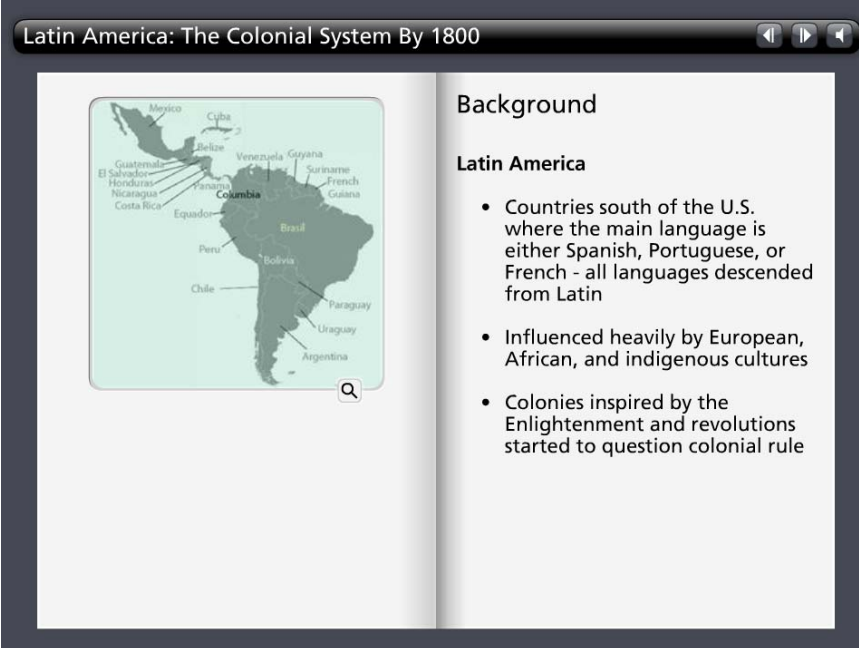
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## Background



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#### Latin America

- Countries south of the U.S. where the main language is either Spanish, Portuguese, or French - all languages descended from Latin
- Influenced heavily by European, African, and indigenous cultures
- Colonies inspired by the Enlightenment and revolutions started to question colonial rule

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## Narration Script

The term Latin America applies to the countries located to the south of the modern United States. In these countries, Spanish, Portuguese, or French are the primary spoken languages. The name Latin America refers to the fact that all of the languages spoken in this region descended from Latin. Society in this region has been influenced heavily by European, African, and indigenous cultures.

You may have learned that the French Revolution was inspired by the Enlightenment, as well as by the American Revolution. As Enlightenment ideas spread beyond Europe to the colonies, the colonial populations of Spain, Portugal, and France started to question the idea of colonial rule.


During the 1800s, there were a number of military clashes among different groups living in the colonies of Latin American, and this period produced a number of successful independence movements throughout the region.

## The Effects of Conquest

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### The Effects of Conquest

- *Conquistador* - soldier in Spanish
- Demise of Aztec and Inca Empires
- Native American population decimated



*Image: Hernán Cortés meeting Aztec Emperor*

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### **Narration Script**

Latin America was conquered primarily by Spain and Portugal. Conquistadors, or soldiers, from these countries arrived in the 1500s and 1600s and took control of the land from the native empires. Unlike the indigenous populations, Spanish and Portuguese military leaders, like Hernando Cortez, had superior weapons such as steel swords, horses, and guns. With better military technology, the conquistadors were able to conquer the large native empires, like the Aztec in Mexico.

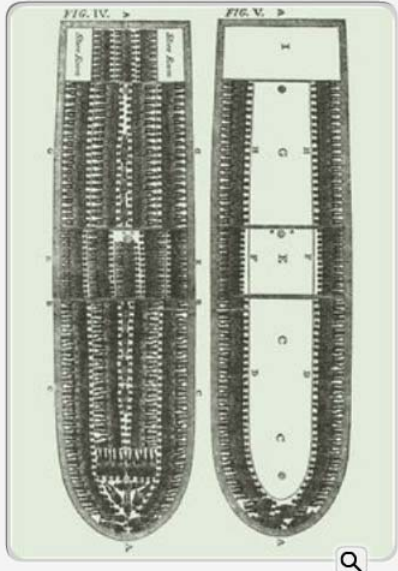
As Europeans started to migrate to Latin America, a large percentage of the native population was wiped out by diseases to which they were not immune. In the 1500s and 1600s, about 90% of the indigenous people died from smallpox and other diseases.

## Slave Trade

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### Slave Trade

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- Brazil imported slaves as a colony, and later as an independent nation



*Image: A diagram of a ship from the slave trade*

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Europeans imported African slaves to work on colonial plantations. Millions of Africans were taken to Latin America during the first 100 years after the European conquest of Latin America.

As a Portuguese colony, and even after its independence, Brazil consistently imported more slaves from Africa than any other country or colony. From the 1500s to the 1800s, Brazil was the most common location for slaves in the Americas.

## Colonial Outposts

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### Colonial Outposts

- Spain and Portugal established outposts in the colonies to exploit resources and build wealth
- Some outposts later became colonies and major cities:

Spanish Outposts

- Mexico City (Mexico)
- Havana (Cuba)
- Lima (Peru)
- Buenos Aires (Argentina)

Portuguese Outposts

- Sao Paulo (Brazil)

*Image: The "Palacio de Ayuntamiento" has been Mexico City's seat of power since the Spanish conquest*

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## ***Narration Script***

Spain and Portugal established colonies in Latin America to enrich their governments and get access to local resources. They built capitals in the colonies, which served as commercial hubs and outposts of colonial authority. São Paulo in modern day Brazil was the first permanent Portuguese colony, and Mexico City was the first Spanish permanent settlement in Latin America. Other notable colonial outposts included Lima in Peru, Havana in Cuba, and Buenos Aires in Argentina.


Most of these colonial outposts are Latin America's modern-day commercial and population centers.

## Kings and Viceroy

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### Kings and Viceroy

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- Viceroy were absolute leaders of colonies and outposts



Diego Carrillo de Mendoza Pimentel, Conde de Niebla, Virrey de Nueva España

Image: Viceroy Diego Carrillo de Mendoza

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### **Narration Script**

Latin American colonial governments were replicas of the mother countries' governments, which were absolute monarchies. The highest ranking Conquistadors in the colonies were appointed as Viceroy, as in "vice-royalty." Viceroy were like assistant or "vice" kings and had authority in their associated colony. Viceroy were the absolute monarchs of these colonies, since the mother countries' kings were thousands of miles away in Europe.

## Racial Class Structure

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### Racial Class Structure

Colonies had a rigid class structure based on racial purity:

- **Espanoles** - Individuals born in Europe; they could own land, participate in the colonial government, and become Viceroy
- **Creoles** - People of European descent born in America; they could own property and owned most plantations, ranches, and mines
- **Mestizos** - Individuals of both European and Native American heritage
- **Native Americans and African Slaves** - Both groups had limited or no rights

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*Image: Diagram of the colonial class structure*

### Narration Script

Under the rule of the colonial Viceroy, colonies developed a rigid class structure developed based on racial purity and location of birth.

The highest class was made up of Espanoles, or individuals born in Europe. Espanoles could own land, participate in the colonial government, and were the only people who could become Viceroy. The



Creoles were located in the next level of the class structure. These were people of European descent that were born in America, so they were not as privileged as the Spanoles. Creoles were able to own property; in fact, they owned most of the plantations, ranches, and mines in the colonies. The Mestizos were located below Creoles in the class structure. They were individuals of both European and Native American heritage. At the bottom of the colonial class structure were Native Americans and African slaves. Both groups had limited or no rights.

## Colonial Economies

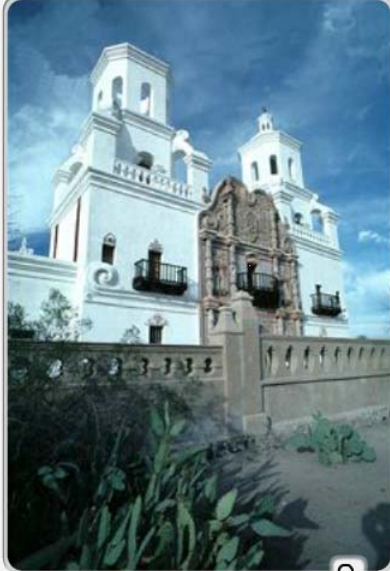
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### Colonial Economies

Based on two main activities:

- Mining precious metals such as gold and silver for export to Europe and Asia
- Growing cash crops on plantations to sell for profit in Europe

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*Image: A Latin American colonial hacienda*

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*Image: A Latin American colonial hacienda*

### **Narration Script**


The economies of the Latin American colonies were based primarily on two activities: mining and agriculture. Precious metals, such as gold and silver, were mined for export to the mother countries. Mining companies used indigenous people and slaves as mining labor. In addition, plantations grew crops, such as sugarcane, to sell for profit back in Europe. Large estates known as haciendas were established around mines and plantations and became very profitable.

## Religion in the Colonies

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### Religion in the Colonies

- Spain and Portugal - Both Catholic countries that sent missionaries to convert both indigenous people and slaves to Catholicism
- The Catholic Church established universities in Spanish colonies
- Today, the majority of people in the region are observers of the Catholic faith.



*Image: The Christ the Redeemer statue overlooking Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; courtesy of Klaus with K*

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### **Narration Script**

Catholicism was and is still the main religion of both Spain and Portugal. During the Latin American colonial period, Catholic missionaries were sent to convert both indigenous people and slaves to Catholicism.

In the Spanish colonies, the Catholic Church played a pivotal role in converting local people. The Church established universities to educate priests for the conversion process. The University of Mexico was established in 1551, just 31 years after the Hernando Cortez conquest. Catholicism has influenced the people and culture of Latin America. Today, the majority of people in the region are observers of the Catholic faith.