

Latin American Revolution

The Consolidation of Latin America, 1830-1920

European imperialism in the nineteenth century swallowed up much of Southeast Asia, India, Africa, and the Pacific. Three areas escaped full inclusion in the imperialist net East Asia, Russia, and the Middle East. More surprisingly, Latin America, one of the earliest European colonial ventures, successfully cast off European political control and gained independence.

Latin American political leaders were shaped in the era of Enlightenment beliefs and accepted concepts common in the West, such as progress and rights in property. Despite some common ideology, the new nations faced numerous problems inherited from their colonial past

From Colonies to Nations

By the late eighteenth century, Creole elites in Latin America were prepared to separate from Spain, but fear of racial and class conflict prevented successful action. Revolution occurred only after the Napoleonic wars disrupted the government of Spain.

The revolutions in Latin America were part of a series of rebellions from the American Revolution through the French Revolution. In 1791, slaves under Toussaint L'Overture successfully overthrew the colonial government of St. Domingue and established the independent republic of Haiti. The more radical aspects of the French revolution and the specter of black rebellion in Haiti frightened the Creole elites of Latin America. What precipitated rebellion was the breakdown of the Spanish monarchy during the Napoleonic wars. In Latin America, Creoles set up independent governments that claimed to rule in the name of the exiled Spanish monarch.

Rebellion in Mexico began in 1810 under the leadership of Father Miguel de Hidalgo, who called on the support of mestizos and Indians. Hidalgo's movement failed for lack of Creole support, but a second revolutionary movement with more Creole support broke out in 1820. Under a Creole military officer, Augustin de Iturbide, the revolutionaries seized Mexico City and proclaimed Iturbide emperor in 1821. Mexico initially maintained control over Central America but separated from its southern neighbors in 1838. In northern South America, Simon Bolivar emerged as the leader of the revolutionary forces. Between 1817 and 1822 he defeated Spanish forces in Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador to form the new nation of Gran Colombia.

After 1830, these nations split into independent states. In southern South America, the revolutionary leader was Jose de San Martin. An Argentinean, San Martin mobilized resistance in his native colony, then crossed the Andes to Chile. By 1824, San Martin had carried the revolution into the most conservative colony of Peru and

defeated the Spanish forces there. All of Spanish South America had won independence by 1825.

Independence in Brazil was achieved by different methods. Early movements for independence failed because of the general fear of slave uprisings. In 1807, the entire Portuguese royal family fled their home country in the face of a French invasion and emigrated to Brazil, where a government in exile was set up. The Portuguese king, Dom João VI, ruled his empire from Rio de Janeiro. Brazilian ports were opened to international commerce. When the king returned to Portugal in 1820, his son proclaimed independence in Brazil in 1822. Brazil became a monarchy under Dom Pedro I.

New Nations Confront Old and New Problems

Most of the independent nations accepted the need to establish representative governments, rights to private property, and free trade. There was less agreement over the position of the Roman Catholic Church in the new states. Revolutionary ideals led to the abolition of slavery in all states except Brazil and the remaining Spanish colonies. Voting rights tended to be restricted by race to favor Creoles, and women remained without voting rights. Indian populations and people of mixed origins remained outside the egalitarian principles of the new governments

Mexico quickly abandoned its experiment with monarchy and established a republic in 1832. Its government remained unstable until the 1860s. In Central America initial attempts to form a unified government gave way to individual states in 1838. Cuba and Puerto Rico remained within the orbit of Spanish colonialism. Consolidation also failed in South America. New Granada, Bolívar's attempt to unify northern South America, failed in 1830. The attempts of Rio de la Plata to transform revolutionary leadership into a political union failed. Paraguay, Uruguay and Chile remained independent. Peru and Bolivia temporarily united, but formed separate governments in 1839. Poor transportation and communication networks magnified problems of national integration

Decades of war gave rise to regional military figures, or caudillos, who dominated local areas and sometimes seized national governments. Caudillos often operated out of self-interest, but they were capable of seeking support from regional elites or from Indians, peasants, or the poor.

Disagreements also arose within the new governments over the degree of centralization the new republican governments should have. Federalists wished regional governments to establish policies, while centrists wanted powerful, central administrations. Liberals tended to support federalist policies, while political conservatives wanted centralized governments and supported corporate institutions, such as the Catholic Church. Liberals attempted to limit the role of the Church in civil affairs. Political parties representing these points of view sprang up in many of the new republics. Regardless of political view, leaders in Latin America

tended to come from the class of wealthy landowners. Rapid political change was the rule in Latin America in the first half century after independence. Constitutions and leadership came and went swiftly. Brazil, with its monarchy, was perhaps the most stable government in the region.

Latin-American Economies and World Markets, 1820 - 1870

Great Britain's determination to recognize Latin American independence forestalled European plans to restore the Spanish empire. The United States also supported the independence movement through the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. Britain's support for the new nations was tied to the opening of trade with Latin America. Britain rapidly replaced Spain as the region's largest trading partner. The dominance of the British hindered the development of Latin American industries and reinforced the economic dependence of Latin America in the world trade network.

From 1820 to 1850, the post-independence economy of Latin America remained stagnant. After 1850, in response to European demand for Latin American products, the economy quickened.

Enhanced trade permitted greater state development of important infrastructure, such as roads and railroads. The pattern was established that the Latin American economy was strictly dependent on levels of imports supported through the world trade network. Uneasy alliances between peasants and conservatives prevented rapid economic change proposed by the urban middle class

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, another surge in the European economy produced greater demand for Latin American products. Economies expanded rapidly. The economic growth created support for liberal policies and led to liberal governments after 1860. Attempts to impose European economic models on Latin American economies often failed. Immigrants from Europe entered Latin America to fill a labor demand that ignored Indian populations. Wealthy landowners continued to monopolize the countryside at the expense of small farmers.

The federalist constitution of 1824 failed to address the inequitable distribution of land or the status of the Indian population of Mexico. It was quickly abandoned in favor of military leadership. For much of the period after 1835, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna served as the most important military and political figure in Mexico. Santa Anna enjoyed mixed results in fighting off foreign attempts to intervene in Mexico. Anglo-American settlers in the northern province of Texas rebelled and declared independence. Failure to suppress the Texas independence movement led to the United States' annexation of the region in 1845. The United States won the Mexican-American War and forced the cession of Texas, California, and much of Mexico's territory north of the Rio Grande River.

Mexico's failures in foreign policy at last led to the removal of Santa Anna as the chief political figure of the republic. Liberal rebellion against the caudillo resulted in Santa Anna's ouster and the creation of a liberal constitution. Conservatives rejected the liberal constitution and turned to France as an ally. French forces overthrew the republic and placed Maximilian von Habsburg on the throne as emperor in 1862. When French forces were withdrawn, liberals returned to power under Benito Juarez in 1867. Juarez continued to govern until his death in 1872.

In Brazil, a functioning republic existed behind the facade of monarchy. Independence was achieved in 1822 under Dom Pedro I, who ruled as king. When Dom Pedro I was deposed in 1831, a series of regencies ruled in the name of the young Dom Pedro II. Between 1831 and 1840, regional governments opposed centralized rule from Rio de Janeiro. After 1840, Dom Pedro II ruled in his own name as a liberal, who sought to increase economic growth. The Brazilian economy was revolutionized by the emergence of coffee as an export crop.

As coffee production expanded, slavery was intensified as a source of coercive labor. As with other liberal governments of the period, Dom Pedro II improved the country's infrastructure and sought foreign investments to capitalize internal projects. Extensive European immigration into Brazil broadened the labor force and reduced the need for slavery. In 1888, slavery was finally abolished. Weakened by long participation in an unpopular war and by opposition from the Church, the monarchy did not long survive the abolition of slavery. In 1889, a military coup deposed the emperor and established a republic.

Conclusion: New Nations, Old Problems

During the nineteenth century, the former colonies of Latin America constructed new nations. There were many difficulties. Latin America was forced to forge economies in a world trade network already dominated by European nations. The new nations carried with them colonial social systems that were strictly hierarchical and in which a small Creole elite dominated the economy and politics. Indians, former slaves, and peasants shared little in the economic expansion of the second half of the century. In a sense, Latin America was the first region of the world to undergo the problems of decolonization