Early Latin America

Iberians and Portuguese: From Reconquest to Conquest

- The Christian reconquest of the Iberian peninsula shaped the monarchies of Spain and Portugal. Spain, formed by the unification of Aragon and Castile, emerged as a militantly Christian state. Persecution of the peninsula's Jews followed.
- Iberian traditions were transferred to conquered lands, including slaveholding and the patriarchal family. Portugal and Spain created centralized colonial governments, dependent on professional bureaucrats and the clergy.
- The first phase of conquest—from 1492 to 1570—saw the establishment of the administrative framework. Encomiendas, grants of Indian workers, were given to settlers. From 1570 to 1700, the framework was fleshed out as institutions took shape.
- The Spanish experience in establishing control of the Caribbean islands was formative. Hispaniola (1493), Puerto Rico (1508), and Cuba (1511) were settled by encomenderos. The Spanish developed a pattern of colonial urban design, and political institutions such as governors. By the 1520s, a shift to ranching and sugar plantations had taken place, with devastating results for the native populations.
- The conquest of the Americas was undertaken by individuals under royal authority. Hernán Cortés succeeded in taking Tenochtitlan and killing Moctezuma II. Spanish New Spain took the place of the Aztec confedera. To the south, Francisco Pizarro conquered the Inca, whose capital at Cuzco fell in 1533. Pedro de Valdivia founded the city of Santiago, Chile in 1541. Francisco Vásquez de Coronado led an expedition into the southwestern United States.
- The men who undertook these expeditions, from a variety of backgrounds, hoped to become wealthy. Their superior military technology, disease, and existing division within the native empires led to their success.
- The morality of destroying Indian societies was questioned by many. Yet it was justified by most on the basis of natural inferiority. Bartolomé de las Casas was one of the most outspoken critic of abuses. Yet by the time he gained a hearing, the conquests were essentially accomplished.

I n t r u c t i o n and Transformation of American Indian Societies

- Population decline occurred in all of the American peoples. The small numbers of natives remaining were then more vulnerable to further disruption.
- While enslavement of Indians was generally stopped by about 1550, forced labor was common. For political reasons, the practice of granting encomiendas was stopped by the 1620s. The practice of mita, or forced labor, in Peru, used Indians
for mining and other state projects. In spite of widespread economic changes, indigenous culture showed great continuity.

**Colonial Economies and Governments**

- In terms of revenue, mining was the most important colonial enterprise. The looted gold from the first decades of conquest was followed across the Atlantic by newly-mined gold and silver.
- Mexico and Peru held the greatest stores of silver. At Potosí in modern Bolivia, and Zacatecas, in Mexico, mining communities developed. Modernization of silver extraction, using mercury from Huancavelica, greatly increased silver exports. The mining industry led to the growth of other domestic industries, such as cloth manufacture.
- Indian traditional agriculture continued, along with the Spanish haciendas, rural estates. On the latter, crops such as sugar were grown for export.
- Although industries such as woolen cloth production made the colonies more self-sufficient, mining dominated the economy. Spaniards had the monopoly on trade with Spanish America. All trade passed through Seville, with its consulado, or merchant guild. Spain kept other nations out of its commercial sphere with galeons and the use of fortified ports such as Havana. In spite of the great wealth flowing into Spain, much of it flowed out to the rest of Europe. In any case, the revenue from taxation was greater.
- By the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, Spain and Portugal divided their conquests. Spain ruled its empire with the use of letrados, lawyers. The mass of colonial law was recodified in 1681 as the Recopilación. The Council of the Indies governed the colonies from Spain through two viceroyos. Their domains were further divided into 10 judicatures each: the audiencias. The Catholic Church was a major component of rule. The religious orders were responsible for conversion and education, and sometimes for the protection of natives. The role of the orders was later assumed by the secular church hierarchy, controlled by the Spanish crown.
- European culture and thought was imported and disseminated largely through the church. Even offices of the Inquisition were established.

**Brazil: The First Plantation Colony**

- The Portuguese first reached South America in 1500, at Brazil, but the territory was ignored for decades. Portuguese nobles were granted captaincies, nearly autonomous domains. They were followed by Jesuits, and a series of coastal settlements grew up.
- Sugar cane was by far the greatest commodity, demanding large amounts of capital and labor. A model plantation colony, Brazilian society started with white planters at the top, and ended with slaves. A governor-general represented Portuguese rule. Unlike Spanish America, Brazil was only part of the vast Portuguese empire. Its dependence on Portugal was great, and the colony was slow to develop its own cultural life.
- European political developments were echoed in the colonies. Competition in Europe was also played out in the colonies. However, Portugal’s hold on Brazil was
extended when Paulistas explored the interior. Gold strikes in the region of Minas Gerais led to a gold rush. Massive importation of slaves led to their making up half the population. By the mid-18th century, Brazil was the world's greatest gold producer. Mining led to further development of the interior, and destruction of more native populations. Rio de Janeiro became the colony's capital.

Multiracial Societies

Three groups came together to form the complex Latin American society. Miscegenation, mixing of races, produced mestizos, who were neither native nor Spanish. The sociedad de castas—society of castes—used race, wealth, occupation, and place of birth to determine a person's place in society. Attempts to sort out the new categories had practical implications, as legal restrictions were applied to different groups. Although at the top of the hierarchy, whites were also subdivided into Spanish-born peninsulares and those born in the colonies: creoles. Considerations such as age, class, and gender carried over from Iberian traditions.

The 18th-Century Reforms

The intellectual climate of the Enlightenment had its impact on the colonies. Clubs of amigos del pais met to discuss reform. Spain's hold on its colonies was threatened by piracy and the competition of other European nations. Spanish oversight of its colonial systems flagged, leading to corruption and loss of revenue. The War of the Spanish Succession, resolved by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, opened the Spanish trading empire to France and England.

The Bourbon reforms of Charles III and his successors revived Spanish control of the colonies. The reforms did not recast the colonial structure, but sought to make it more effective. José de Gálvez investigated the administration of Mexico before taking over as minister of the Indies. He created a system of intendants that made the administration more effective. The loss of Florida and Havana led Spain to strengthen the colonial militia. Grants of monopolies increased the government's control over key commodities. Trade was opened to other nations, leading to a boom in some areas, such as the Buenos Aires ranching industry. However, some areas experienced economic decline. In the long run, the reforms led to widespread dissatisfaction as groups, such as creoles, lost their place in the government.

Under the Marquis of Pombal, similar reforms were carried out in Brazil. He followed the English model of mercantilism, to make good the revenue loss due to declining gold production. He granted monopolies to develop agriculture, and the region of the Amazon in particular. To people the area, he encouraged mixed marriages. His reforms were only partially successful.

Population growth in Latin America went along with exploitation of new areas and a higher volume of exports to Europe. Latin American society, disrupted by the reforms of the Bourbons and Pombal, was in ferment. The Comunero Revolt of 1781 nearly ended colonial rule in New Granada. The native rising of Tupac Amaru in Peru took three years to suppress. Brazil, on the other hand, experienced no major revolts. Deep divisions in colonial society made unified protest unlikely.
Africa and the Africans in the Age of the Atlantic Slave Trade

The Portuguese led the way in exploring the African coast, establishing factories to facilitate trade, El Mina, in West Africa, being the most important. More interested in trade than conquest, Portuguese relations with African rulers was generally peaceable. They did seek conversion; their greatest success was Nzinga Mvemba, ruler in the Kongo. On both sides, attitudes to the foreign culture were mixed. As the Portuguese explored down the coast they founded Luanda, expanded later to the colony of Angola. Other nations followed the Portuguese, bringing competition. The trade in slaves developed slowly, as only one of many commodities. Slavery in Europe, except for Iberia, had disappeared. It took the development of sugar plantations to raise a need for slave labor.

How many slaves were exported? The numbers are problematic, but as much as 12 million were taken across the Atlantic in four centuries. High mortality—on board and on the plantations—coupled with low birth rates, kept demand high. Brazil received about 42% of the slaves. The trade was initially in Africans from Senegambia, then from modern Zaire and Angola, and finally from Dahomey and Benin.

The trans-Saharan slave trade was mostly in women, for concubines in Islamic lands, while the trans-Atlantic trade took men for agricultural labor.

For much of the history of the slave trade, Portugal controlled traffic. From 1630, competition increased, and the Dutch seized El Mina in 1637. The British Royal Africa Company was followed by similar French enterprises. Following the Portuguese example, other nations established small outposts on the coast. Purchases of slaves were made through local rulers, although sporadic raids also occurred. A system based on a healthy male slave—the Indies piece—set prices on the commodity. Was the trade profitable? In itself it was probably not as profitable as it was crucial to the triangular trade that developed.

Societies, Slavery, and the Slave Trade

African traditions of slavery were deeply engrained in economic systems, and in the social hierarchy. The condition of slaves varied greatly. The practice of using slaves as concubines was part of the widespread practice of polygamy. In Islam, slavery was accepted, but not enslavement of Muslims.

Europeans tapped into the established slave trade, but also intensified the trade. European penetration into the continent brought other changes. Endemic war-
fare typified much of Sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Songhay. One of the results was a constant supply of slaves. As Europeans settled along the coast, they provoked a shift in the power relations of states in the interior. Ghana and Songhay were able to make use of their position as intermediaries in commerce.

Asante and Dahomey serve as examples of the impact of the slave trade. Asante, composed of the Akan people in the Kumasi region, emerged in the era of the slave trade. Osei Tutu unified the Akan clans, taking the title asantahene, or supreme ruler. For nearly two centuries, ca. 1650–1820, Asante ruled along the Gold Coast. Agaja, king of Dahomey, made use of European firearms to establish an empire. Controlling the slave trade in its region, Dahomey remained an independent, unified state longer than most of its neighbors. Cultural development continued on the continent. Political experimentation included increasingly powerful monarchs and monarchs limited by governing councils. The arts continued to thrive, often led by artisan guilds. Demand for African crafts to suit European tastes increased Africa’s contact with other world areas.

The Swahili east coast still formed part of the Indian Ocean trading area, bringing ivory, gold, and slaves from the interior of the continent. Clove plantations using African slaves developed on Zanzibar and other islands. The interior of Africa is less well understood. Movements of Nilotic groups including the Luo peoples led to a network of dynasties in east central Africa. The kingdom of Bunyoro was one of the most prominent in the 1500s and 1600s. Islamization, following the breakup of Songhay, took on a more dynamic, even militant phase. Usman Dan Fodio, a Muslim scholar of the Fulani peoples of the Sudan, was inspired by Sufism. Under his leadership, the Fulani took over several Hausa states, creating the Sokoto kingdom. The expansion of the Fulani had its impact on the west African interior. Slavery in the Sudan expanded, as a result of the wars and of European pressures.

**White Settlers and Africans in Southern Africa**

Southern Africa was initially little influenced by the slave trade. Bantu migrations into the area changed its economy, earlier dominated by Khoikhoi and San hunters and shepherders. The Bantu peoples in southern Africa were organized into small chiefdoms. Their expansion further south brought them into contact with Dutch settlers, moving inland from the Cape Colony in search of land to farm. Under British control from 1815, the colony’s expansion led to warfare with the Bantu. The Boer Great Trek coincided with upheavals among the Bantu peoples.

A new ruler led the Nguni peoples from 1818: Shaka, chief of the Zulu. His ruthless leadership created a powerful Zulu state that survived his death. Shaka’s work was part of the mfecane. Swazi and Lesotho emerged at the same time, resisting Zulu expansion. All of southern Africa was involved in the turmoil of the mfecane.

**The African Diaspora**

The slave trade not only brought slaves forcibly into an alien culture, it also brought foreign products into Africa.
The Middle Passage was always traumatic for slaves, and often lethal.
Africans in the Americas were typically employed in agricultural labor, but other occupations existed.
A hierarchy developed distinguishing saltwater slaves—newly arrived—from their creole descendants. The latter could gain more skilled work in better conditions, and stood a better chance of being manumitted. Slave communities sometimes divided along lines similar to those in Africa. Their numbers grew until they were as much as 80% of colonial populations. The North American slave population had a higher birthrate and less need of newly-enslaved Africans, and thus was more cut off from Africa than slaves in other areas.
Africans in slavery maintained as much of their culture as was possible, depending in part on whether they found themselves with other slaves from their native region. Africans were converted to Christianity, but their religious traditions—obeah—survived. In Brazil and Haiti, African religion survived intact in candomble and vodun respectively. Resistance to slavery was omnipresent, but rarely successful. Palmares, a community of fugitive slaves in Brazil was an exception, as were the Maroons of Jamaica. The Maroons of Suriname also established their own enclave.
Abolition resulted from changes outside of Africa. While self-interest on the part of European countries was a possible reason, the main impulse seems to have come from European intellectuals. Influenced by such men as William Wilberforce, the British stopped the slave trade in 1807. Slavery was finally abolished in the Americas when Brazil stopped the practice in 1888.