INDEPENDENCE: Economy and Society

The nearly decade and a half of wars greatly weakened the Spanish American economies and political institutions, which hindered the region's potential economic development for most of the nineteenth century and resulted in the enduring instability the region experienced. Independence destroyed the de facto trade bloc that was the Spanish Empire - Manila galleons and Spanish treasure fleets in particular. After independence, trade among the new Spanish American nations was less than it had been in the colonial period. Once the ties were broken, the small populations of most of the new nations provided little incentive to entice Spanish American producers to recreate the old trade patterns. In addition, the protection against European competition, which the Spanish monopoly had provided to the manufacturing sectors of the economy, ended. Due to expediency, protective tariffs for these sectors, in particular textile production, were permanently dropped and foreign imports beat out local production. This greatly affected Native communities, which in many parts of Spanish America, specialized in supplying finished products to the urban markets, albeit using pre-industrial techniques. The wars also greatly affected the principal economic sector of the region, mining. Silver production in Bolivia halved after independence and it dropped by three quarters in Mexico.

To compensate for the lack of capital, foreign investment, in particular from Great Britain, was courted, but it was not sizable enough to initiate an economic recovery. Finally the new nations entered the world economy after the end of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, when the economies of Europe and the United States were recovering and aggressively seeking new markets to sell their products after more than two decades of disruption. Ultimately Spanish America could only connect to the world markets as an exporter of raw materials and a consumer of finished products.

In addition to improving the economy, the lower social classes also had to be integrated into the new body politic, although they often got few rewards from independence. The political debate seeking answers to these questions was marked by a clash—at times on the battlefield—between liberalism and conservatism. Conservatives sought to maintain the traditional social structures in order to ensure stability; liberals sought to create a more dynamic society and economy by ending ethnically-based social distinctions and freeing property from economic restrictions. In its quest to transform society, liberals often adopted policies that were not welcome by Native communities, who had benefited from unique protections afforded to them by traditional Spanish law.

[Liberalism and conservatism in Latin America have unique historical roots. Latin American independence began to occur in 1808 after the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars that eventually engulfed all of Europe. French revolutionaries in the 1790s began an intellectual awakening called the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment period opened the door for ideas of positivism in Latin American society. People in Latin America turned to liberal ideologies. Liberalism means the idea of liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty. Liberalism during the early 19th century in Latin American clashed with conservative views. Liberals wanted to end the dominance of the Catholic Church, class stratification and slavery. These issues for many years strongly affected the way that Latin American society was organized. The
majority of liberals believed in a democratic system of government. This system would create many changes and much confusion in Latin American communities in the early 19th century.

On the other hand, conservatism favored existing systems and hierarchies. Conservatives believed chaos and social disorder would break out if the political system were liberalized. Latin American conservatives generally believed in class stratification and opposed radical change in government in Latin America.

The contest between Liberals and Conservatives in Latin America, while sweeping in effect, was largely fought between members of the landed, white or creole elite. Systems in place from the colonial period—such as slavery, patronage by the elite, and debt peonage—meant that the great mass of Indians, Africans, and people of mixed race had little, if any power compared to the very small creole ruling class. Thus, the concern that liberalization would lead to "disorder" that the conservatives spoke about was often a veiled or transparent fear of race war.

Caudillos soon came to power in some Latin American societies, such as Argentina and Mexico. Caudillos were conservatives who promised protection and restoration of traditional ways to the people. They were generally pragmatic, believing in a ruling system of what works best. Caudillos used military force to hold society together.

Independence, however, did initiate the abolition of slavery in Spanish America, as it was seen as part of the independence struggle, since many slaves had gained their manumission by joining the patriot armies. In areas where slavery was not a major source of labor (Mexico, Central America, Chile), emancipation occurred almost immediately after independence was achieved. In areas where slavery was a main labor source (Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina), emancipation was carried out in steps over the next three decades, usually first with the creation of free-womb laws and programs for compensated emancipation. By the early 1850s, slavery had been abolished in the independent nations of Spanish America.

Independence also did not result in stable political regimes, save in a few countries. First, the new nations did not have well-defined identities, but rather the process of creating identities was only beginning. This would be carried out through newspapers and the creation of national symbols, including new names for the countries ("Mexico", "Colombia," "Ecuador," "Bolivia," "Argentina"), that broke with the past. In addition, the borders were also not firmly established, and the struggle between federalism and centralism, which begun in independence, continued throughout the rest of the century. Two large states that emerged from the wars—Gran Colombia and the Federal Republic of Central America—collapsed after a decade or two, and Argentina would not consolidate politically until the 1860s.[47]

The wars destroyed the old civilian bureaucracy that had governed the region for centuries, as institutions such as the audiencias were eliminated and many Peninsular officials fled to Spain. The Catholic Church, which had been an important social and political institution during the colonial period, initially came out weakened by the end of the conflicts. As with government officials, many Peninsular bishops abandoned their dioceses and their posts were not filled for decades until new prelates could be created and relations between the new nations and the
Vatican was regularized. Then as the Church recovered, its economic and political power was attacked by liberals.[48]

Despite the fact that the period of the wars of independence itself was marked by a rapid expansion of representative government,[49] for several of the new nations the nineteenth century was marked by militarism because of the lack of well-defined political and national institutions. The armies and officers that came into existence during the process of independence wanted to ensure that they got their rewards once the struggle was over. Many of these armies did not fully disband once the wars were over and they proved to be one of the more stable institutions in the first decades of national existence. These armies and their leaders effectively influenced the course of political development. Out of this new tradition came the caudillos, strongmen who amassed formal and informal economic, military and political power in themselves.[50]

[A body politic is a metaphor in which a nation is considered to be a corporate entity,[2] being likened to a human body. The word “politic” in this phrase is a postpositive adjective; so it is "a body of a politic nature" rather than "a politic of a bodily nature". A body politic comprises all the people in a particular country considered as a single group. The analogy is typically continued by reference to the top of government as the head of state,[3] but may be extended to other anatomical parts, as in political readings of the Aesop's fable, "The Belly and the Members". The metaphor appears in the French language as the corps-état.[4] The metaphor developed in Renaissance times, as the medical knowledge based upon the classical work of Galen was being challenged by new thinkers such as William Harvey. Analogies were made between the supposed causes of disease and disorder and their equivalents in the political field which were considered to be plagues or infections which might be remedied by purges and nostrums]

LATIN AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS

- In the late 1700s, Enlightenment and revolutionary ideas spread from Europe and the United States to Latin America.
- Educated Latin Americans read works by the Enlightenment writers and Thomas Jefferson.
- The success of the American Revolution showed that foreign rule could be thrown off. The French Revolution showed that the people could overthrow an unjust monarch. These two events inspired revolutions in Latin America.
- The French colony of Haiti was the first Latin American colony to revolt against European rule.
- French planters owned large sugar plantations. Millions of enslaved Africans worked in horrible conditions.
- The French gave few rights to mulattoes (mixed African and European ancestry).
- In 1791 a self-educated ex-slave named Toussaint L’Ouverture led a revolt. Haitians slaves won their freedom in 1798.
- In 1802, Napoleon sent an army to Haiti to reestablish French rule. The French captured Toussaint but yellow fever took its toll on the French army.
In 1804 Haiti became an independent country.

In South America in the early 1800s, an educated creole named Simon Bolivar vowed to fight Spanish rule.

He was called “the Liberator” and became one of the greatest Latin American nationalists of this period.

Bolivar began his fight in 1810 and it lasted 12 years. His military campaigns won independence for Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.

He also joined forces with Jose de San Martin who defeated the Spanish in Argentina and Chile in the 1810s

Bolivar, however, did not fulfill his dream of a united Latin American state. Instead, Latin America became a group of independent states with problems gaining stability, social equality, and economic prosperity.

**INSTABILITY IN LATIN AMERICA**

Life after independence did not improve for most people in Latin America. Revolts and civil war broke out while prejudice and poverty continued.

Geographic barriers led to regionalism which kept Latin Americans from truly uniting.

There was also social injustice in many new countries. The colonial class structure still was alive and well. This led to oligarchies (rule by a few) of wealthy landowners controlling the newly independent countries.

Mestizos, mulattoes, Indians, and Africans gained few rights and had to work as peasants on plantations.

In many countries, caudillos (military rulers) ignored constitutions and set up dictatorships. These dictatorships usually favored the wealthy classes.

The Catholic Church also tried to hold on to its power and land. Liberals in many countries looked to reduce the Church’s power.

The cash crop economies set up by colonialism made the independent nations vulnerable to natural disasters like droughts or hurricanes which could wipe out a crop and destroy the economy.

Economic imperialism saw foreign nations invest in farming, transportation, and mining but only the upper classes and foreign investors profited.

**THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION**

General Porfirio Diaz was a Mexican dictator in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Under his rule the economy of Mexico improved due to foreign investment, however, only the upper class benefitted. Diaz was a ruthless dictator that oppressed opposition leaving most Mexicans uneducated and poor.

Several figures led a revolution against Diaz.
Emiliano Zapata led a large peasant revolt calling for landform.

Francisco "Pancho" Villa was a rebel leader in the north who won the loyalty of a large number of peasants. The United States supported the Mexican government against Villa which led to a border conflict in 1916.

Venustiano Carranza was elected President of Mexico in 1917 with a new constitution that, with amendments, is still in force today.

The Constitution of 1917 called for land reform, gave the government control of Church estates, and guaranteed more rights to workers and women.

Social reforms included libraries and schools as well as giving some Indians the opportunity to regain lost lands.

Economic nationalism meant that the government brought many foreign industries under its control.

Cultural nationalism meant that Mexicans began to take pride in their culture. Mexican culture was a combination of Western European and Native American art. Mural painting showed the struggles of Mexicans for freedom.