3

COLONIAL CRUCIBLE

Rule by Spain and Portugal lasted three long centuries in Latin America. Despite the utopian dreams of the religiously inspired and despite continual resistance to exploitation, the bitter legacy of conquest and slavery remained strong in 1800, the eve of independence. Latin Americans had wrestled with the hierarchy of race imposed by conquest and slavery and had adapted themselves to that hierarchy. As Latin American societies grew around the hard edges of domination like the roots of a tree gradually embracing the rocks at its base, adaptation made colonization endurable but also embedded it in people's habits. Indigenous, African, and European people consorted and intermingled, fought and slept together. They misunderstood and learned about, despised, and sometimes adored each other. Over hundreds of years, most Latin Americans began to sincerely accept Catholicism and the rule of a Spanish or Portuguese king. Thus, more than merely rule by outsiders, colonization

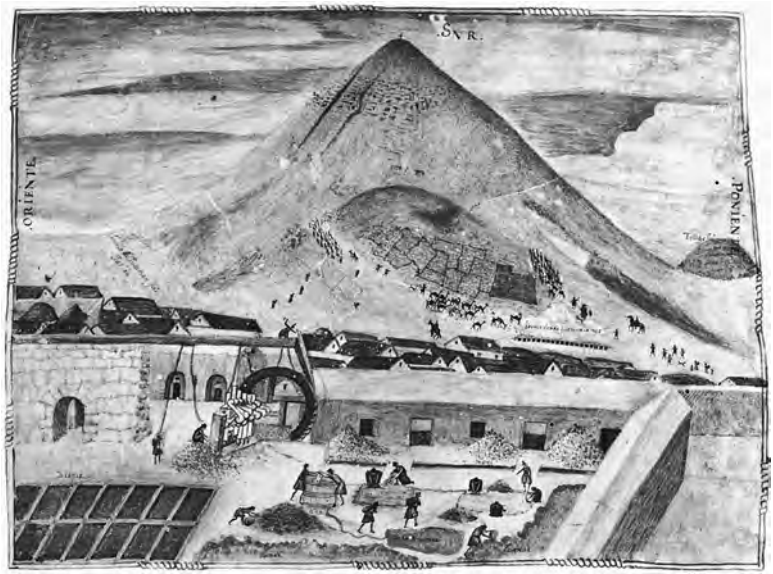
was a social and cultural, even a psychological process. The resulting patterns of domination—intricate and omnipresent—constitute the saddest product of the colonial crucible.

The contours of colonial Latin American societies revealed the priorities of the Iberian invaders. A whirlwind tour of the colonies will explain the basic economic patterns and geographical layout. To begin, only precious metals and a few high-priced items such as sugar (then a luxury) could repay the enormous costs of transportation across the Atlantic Ocean. So mines and sugar plantations loom large in the early history of Latin America.

COLONIAL ECONOMICS

Silver and sugar shaped the emerging colonial economies. Gold was the precious metal that first mesmerized the Europeans, however—gold from Aztec and Inca treasures, gold that could easily be panned in sandy streambeds and was quickly exhausted. An early Caribbean gold rush had helped annihilate the Arawaks during the first generation of Spanish colonization. But silver, not gold, eventually structured the colonial economy of Spanish America. The major silver mines of Zacatecas (Mexico) and Potosí (Peru) were opened in the 1540s. Zacatecas, an area without sedentary inhabitants, attracted indigenous migrants from central Mexico. Migrants also became miners at Potosí, on a windswept mountain plateau at twelve thousand feet, where Spanish smelting techniques (using a bellows) did not work and indigenous ones (channeling the Andean wind) had to be adopted instead. These were deep-shaft mines that went miles under the earth, vast quasi-industrial enterprises that attracted diverse assortments of people. Mining immediately began to reshape Mexican and Peruvian society.

The mining zones became the great focus of Spanish activity in America, linking the colonies economically with Europe. For a while in the 1600s, Potosí became the most populous city in America. And because Potosí stood more or less on the roof of the world, too high for agriculture, almost everything except silver had to be



POTOSÍ. Honeycombed with mine shafts, the "mountain of silver" looms over the city of Potosí in modern Bolivia—called Upper Peru at the time of this 1584 painting. In the foreground, silver ore is being crushed by water-powered machinery and mixed with mercury to extract the precious metal. *The Granger Collection, New York.*

brought to it by mules. Sure-footed mules, bred on the plains of Argentina, trooped up narrow Andean trails to provide transportation. Indigenous women elsewhere in the Andes wove cloth to dress the miners, and farmers at lower altitudes sent food to feed them. (To apply economic concepts here, "primary" export production stimulated "secondary" supply activities.) Eventually, silver came down from the sky on mules bound for the coast. Because the high plateau of the central Andes is so remote from the coast, the Peruvian capital was established at Lima, near a good seaport. Likewise, the wealth of colonial Mexico clustered along routes connecting the northern mines with Mexico City and the port of Veracruz. The northern mining zones became a meeting place for all

sorts of people, while southern Mexico, along with Guatemala, had a more strictly indigenous population. The main ethnicities in this southern region were Zapotec, Mixtec, and especially Maya—the people among whom Malinche grew up. Now all of southern Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean became part of the supply network for the northern silver mines.

The economic priorities of the Spanish Crown determined the political organization of the colony. The "royal fifth," a 20 percent tax on mining, was the prime source of colonial revenue for the Spanish state. To keep an eye on the royal fifth, the Crown organized colonial governments in New Spain (the colonial name for Mexico, administratively embracing Central America and the Caribbean as well) and Peru (which then included much of South America), by the late 1540s. Each of these areas, called *viceroyalties* because of the *viceroys* sent from Spain to rule in the king's name, also had an archbishop and a high court. Eventually, Mexico City and Lima each developed a wholesale merchants' guild that concentrated commercial power, as well as political power, in the *viceregal* capitals. Gradually, the viceroyalties, high courts, and other administrative subdivisions multiplied in a manner guided by the principle of profitability to the Crown. Modern Colombia became the center of a third viceroyalty (called New Granada, 1717) partly because of its gold. Eventually, another jurisdiction was created to stop Potosí silver from escaping untaxed through the area of modern Argentina. This became the fourth viceroyalty (the Río de la Plata, 1776), with its capital at the Atlantic port of Buenos Aires. Despite the two new viceroyalties, however, Peru and Mexico remained the core areas of Spanish colonization.


ORIGINAL AREAS OF COLONIZATION, 1500–1700
fringe
Zacatecas
Guanajuato
fringe
Orinoco R.
Amazon R.
Lima
Potosí
Salta
Paraná R.
fringe
São Francisco R.
fringe
São Paulo and the roving bandeirantes
fringe
Core areas of colonization
Missions
Sugarcane
Silver

A POWER CALLED HEGEMONY

Both the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns had limited resources for colonization. Neither had large military forces in the American colonies. Iberian colonizers and their American-born descendants were a small minority even in the core areas, so how did they maintain control over so much of the hemisphere for three centuries?

To answer that question, consider the life of Sor (Sister) Juana Inés de la Cruz, a Mexican nun who died in 1695. At the age of seven, Juana had made a surprising announcement. She wanted to attend the University of Mexico (which had opened its doors in 1553, a century before Harvard). She offered to dress as a boy, but it was hopeless. A university education was supposedly over Juana's head. Never mind that she had been reading since the age of three or that she learned Latin just for fun. Forget that she stumped a jury of forty university professors at the age of seventeen, or that Juana became known throughout Mexico for her poetry. Like other women of her class, she had two alternatives: marry and devote her energies to husband and children, or become a nun. Juana chose convent life, which offered a little more independence than marriage. She became Sor Juana, as she is known to history. She collected and read books by the hundreds, studied mathematics, composed and performed music, and even invented a system of musical notation. Her poetry was published in Europe. Some of it criticized hypocritical male condemnations of women's sexual morality: "Why do you wish them to do right / If you encourage them to do wrong?" asked one poem. And, concerning the common scorn for prostitutes, she wondered who really sinned more: "She who sins for pay / Or he who pays for sin?" In the kitchen, she dabbled in experimental science. "Aristotle would have written more," she said, "if he had done any cooking." When she published a brilliant reply to one of her century's most celebrated biblical scholars, the fathers of the church became worried. Juana received instructions to act more like a woman. Her scientific interests, they said—and all her other interests, too, except for religious devotion—were unnatural in a woman. This was the wisdom of her age. She could not defy

it alone, and ultimately, she consented. She sold her library, instruments, everything, and devoted herself to atonement for the sin of curiosity. Broken, she confessed to being "the worst of women." Soon after, she died while caring for her sisters during a plague.

The fathers of the church never used physical force against Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. They did not have to. They embodied religious authority, and she was a religious woman. Revolt or disobedience was literally unthinkable for her. Similarly, the conquered indigenous people of Latin America, and the enslaved Africans, too, gradually accepted the basic premises of colonial life and principles of Iberian authority. Otherwise, Spain and Portugal could never have ruled vast expanses of America without powerful occupying armies.

Historians explain colonial control of Latin America as *hegemony*, a kind of domination that implies a measure of consent by those at the bottom. Hegemony contrasts with control by violent force. It is a steady preponderance rather than an iron rule. Though it may seem "soft," this form of political power is resilient and does devastating damage to people at the bottom. When they accept the principle of their own inferiority and, in the old-fashioned phrase, "know their place," they participate in their own subjugation.

Religion offers one of the clearest examples of cultural hegemony. When enslaved Africans and indigenous people accepted the Europeans' "true religion," they accepted, by the same token, their own status as newcomers to the truth. Catholicism, after all, had been born and developed far from indigenous America. The history of the "true church" was a European history, and its earthly capital was Rome. Most priests and nuns, not to mention bishops and the rest of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, were of European descent. The monarchs of Spain and Portugal reigned by a divine right that only heretics would question, and they enjoyed royal patronage rights, allowing them to appoint or dismiss priests and bishops almost as if they were Crown officials. The royal government decided where churches should be built and collected the *tithe* (an ecclesiastical tax of 10 percent, paid especially on agricultural products). To sin against Catholic teachings was, in many cases, a criminal offense.

PAINTINGS OF ARMED ANGELS illustrate the close relationship between religion and authority in the eighteenth-century Andes. Their clothing evoked social rank; their muskets, military power; and their wings, the endorsement of heaven. *DEA/M. Seemuller/De Agostini/Getty Images.*

All educational institutions were religious, so if knowledge is power (and it is), the church monopolized that power. The Inquisition kept a list of banned books that people were not allowed to read. The church even controlled time; the tolling of bells set the rhythm of the day, signaling the hours of work, rest, and prayer. Successive Sundays marked the seven-day week, which was new to indigenous people. The Catholic calendar of observances and holidays provided milestones through the year: a collective, public ebb and flow of emotions, from celebration at Epiphany and Carnival, for example, to the somber mood of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. The milestones of individual lives, from baptism to marriage to death, were validated by church sacraments and registered in church records. Place names, too, were frequently religious. Every town and city had an official patron saint, often part of the city's full name—São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco de Quito, and so on.

Another hegemonic force, omnipresent and inescapable, was *patriarchy*, the general principle that fathers rule. Fathers ruled heaven and earth, cities and families. The Spanish and Portuguese were more rigidly patriarchal than many indigenous American and African societies, so the hegemony of fathers must be understood, at least in part, as a legacy of colonialism. Patriarchy structured all colonial institutions, including the exclusively male hierarchy of the church, right up to the Holy Father in Rome. Iberian law was based on patriarchal principles. Husbands had legal control over their wives as over their children. Wealthy women led shut-in, elaborately chaperoned lives, isolated from all male contact outside the family—a matter of *honor* in traditional Spanish and Portuguese sexual ethics.

Honor was a measure of how well men and women played their prescribed, and very different, social roles. Avoiding extramarital sex, in this way of thinking, became something like a woman's supreme life mission, whereas a man's sexual purity held less value. In practice, if a man could support more than one woman, that heightened his social distinction, so many men kept mistresses. On the other hand, men were supposed to defend—specifically by bloodshed—the virginity of their daughters and the sexual exclusivity

of their wives. This conception of honor led to dueling and to the violent punishment of independent-minded women. This cultural pattern has pre-Christian roots in the Mediterranean world and a basic logic, worth mentioning to show the rhyme and reason in this madness, that relates to property. Women's illegitimate children, not men's, would be born into the family and inherit part of its precious patrimony: the family wealth parceled out among heirs at the death of each parent. Male "wild oats," on the other hand, would sprout on somebody else's property, so to speak. Thus male philandering implied no loss, but rather a kind of territorial gain, for the family.

Women resisted being treated like means rather than ends, of course. Fairly often, it seems, they used magic—coming from the folk traditions of Iberia, as well as Africa and indigenous America—to attract, manipulate, escape, or punish men. The Spanish Inquisition was on the alert against them. In 1592 the Inquisition punished a poor Lima woman for reciting a prayer under her breath "so that men would desire her." That was European folk magic, meant to redirect the powers of Catholic liturgy by saying a prayer backward, for example. Inquisition files of the 1600s also reveal native Andean "witches" like Catalina Guacayllano, accused of spilling the blood of guinea pigs on sacred rocks while chewing coca and praying "Oh Lord Father who has been burned, who gives us the irrigation canals and water, give me food." Her idea of God seems to have remained strongly indigenous, giving her, and her people, a spiritual independence from Spanish religion. In explaining why he had three women whipped, a Peruvian priest reported that these witches "went neither to Mass nor to catechism class." Instead, they publicly disobeyed him and inspired their whole village to do the same.

Two centuries later, in 1763, and thousands of miles away, in Grão Pará, at the mouth of the Amazon River, the Portuguese Inquisition collected evidence about various sorts of nonapproved cures—involving smoke, incantations, potions, talismans, shaking walls, medicine bundles, and disembodied voices—that it regarded as witchcraft. But the inquisition's witchcraft was mostly Amazonian

or African religion. (European medicine of the time, recall, focused on bleeding the patient. Besides, there were few European-style "leeches" to be hired in Grão Pará.) These indigenous or African witches were being called in by respectable white people desperate for a cure, and they were paid for their work. In one case, the accused witches were white widows who had apparently learned indigenous traditions and also, according to their accuser, consorted with indigenous men.

Women doubtless got less satisfaction than men out of the colonial Latin American "honor system," which cast suspicion on any woman who did not live under male control, especially widows. Learning to live with these values, for there was no other choice, women absorbed them. Only women of property could make the grade, though, because people without property lacked honor almost by definition. Poor women often had to work outside their homes, after all, as cooks, laundresses, or market women who moved around by themselves in the street as no honorable lady would. Not all roles were honorable, no matter how well played. Slaves, who were themselves somebody else's property, had no hope of honor. Only the most extraordinary slave, like Henrique Dias, a born fighter who led Brazilian forces against Dutch invaders in the 1600s, could achieve it. The women of indigenous communities, whose social life retained different gender patterns, lived less in the grip of this unfortunate honor system.

In sum, cultural hegemony made dominance seem natural and inevitable to the people being dominated. That was its awesome power. Indigenous and African people eventually accepted Iberian kings as their natural rulers by divine right. However, a situation comes to seem the natural "way of the world" only after considerable give-and-take. The less powerful accept ongoing subjugation only after making the best possible bargain with those more powerful. Thus, women accepted patriarchal subjugation but demanded in return that men live up to their responsibilities as good providers and strong protectors. Similarly, when indigenous people and Africans became Catholics, they conceded religious authority in return for a protected status as Christians. Fortunately, there was another, more

positive outcome of all of this. Along with hegemonic dominance, daily give-and-take created distinctive, new Latin American cultures through *transculturation*.

A PROCESS CALLED TRANSCULTURATION

The influential Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz first applied the term transculturation to Cuba's popular music and dance traditions. Transculturation, a two-way street, contrasts with acculturation, which is a one-way street in which one culture replaces another. Ortiz's point was that the dominated cultures of Africans and indigenous people were *not* wiped away, in Latin America, to be replaced by European cultures. Instead, something new resulted from the give-and-take, something not European, not indigenous, not African, but rather, something distinctively Cuban, mixed by definition. Like hegemony, transculturation has become a key concept in Latin American Studies. Historians now believe that transculturation lies at the origin of Latin America's national cultures.

Imagine transculturative give-and-take as a thousand tiny confrontations and tacit negotiations taking place in people's daily lives, always within the force field of hierarchy and domination. Music is needed for the procession, say, or to celebrate the arrival of a new viceroy. Will the slaves be allowed to dance and play their own instruments? That certainly would add to the festivities, at some cost to European dignity, however. The singing of black women in church choirs began to infuse Cuban music with African sensibility as early as the 1580s, but not without resistance. Here we can see that transculturation and hegemony are two sides of the same coin, one positive, the other negative. Cuba's shared musical and dance culture became, famously, a harmonious marriage of Spanish guitar and African drum. That's transculturation in action. The descendants of slaves accepted a subordinate place in Cuban society, excelling as musicians and sports figures only. That's cultural hegemony in action. The descendants of slave owners

accepted African cultural influences as part of a package deal that benefited them, overall. The people on top, in Latin America's colonial crucible, were always able to remain on top, and they were usually able to impose the broad outlines and basic content of the new cultural forms.

The people below contributed more subtle elements of style, rhythm, texture, and mood. Although European forms structured the outer contours of collective life even among indigenous people and slaves, the inner dimensions resisted colonial standardization. Slaves, who gathered and danced on religious feast days, preserved African religion by dressing it in the clothes of Catholic saints, so to speak. A blending of indigenous, African, and European religious attitudes often occurred. The blend might be covert, as when indigenous artists integrated their own sacred plant and animal motifs (and in the Andes, symbolic rainbows) into the mural paintings of Catholic cloisters, but they could be more obvious. The Virgin of Guadalupe, for example, supposedly first appeared on a site already sacred in Aztec times. When an indigenous boy reported seeing the miraculous appearance, the Spanish ecclesiastical authorities were wary of an "Indian virgin" with a dark face, whom Nahuatl-speaking Mexicans continued to call Tonantzin, the name of an indigenous earth goddess. Gradually, though, they accepted her and made her the patron saint of Mexico. As a result, the Nahuas got to see Spaniards kneel before Tonantzin (dress her however you like), and the Spanish religion got a whole new level of indigenous buy-in. Thus did indigenous and African religions infiltrate Latin American Catholicism. The profusion of blood on colonial Mexican crucifixion figures, for example, was meant to evoke blood's life-giving power, a prominent element of Aztec religion. In the Caribbean and Brazil, on the other hand, Catholicism acquired a less austere, more celebratory and African tone. In Salvador, on Brazil's Day of All Saints, an African religious spirit, including dancing to very un-European rhythms, infused many Catholic ceremonies during the 1700s.

Here we need to say a few words about colonial cities, which provided a special setting for transculturation. The Spanish and

THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE, Mexico's patron saint, has both European and indigenous antecedents and has played a unifying role in Mexico since colonial days. © *Leemage/Corbis*.

Portuguese were tiny minorities in colonial Latin America. They quickly founded and crowded into a scattering of small cities with populations of only a few thousand each. In many ways, these were tiny islands of European-style life and architecture dotting the vastness of indigenous America. Still, cities were the staging centers and command centers of the colonial project.

The hegemonic institutions of colonial governance existed only in cities. All administrative officials, bishops, judges, notaries, merchants, and moneylenders—the people whose commands, reports, and dealings with one another connected cities to Europe—were urban based. Cities organized the great public spectacles that dramatized imperial power: solemn processions for Holy Week (preceding Easter), ceremonial welcomes for new viceroys, boisterous celebrations to commemorate royal marriages. Immense churches and convents, viceroys who could literally "grant honors," and refined European ladies and gentlemen who provided models of "superior" behavior made cities impressive. In Spanish America, cities were laid out according to imperial directives mandating the now familiar but then innovative checkerboard of square blocks and streets that intersect at right angles. Around the central square of each city stood the governor's palace, the cathedral, and mansions for the bishop and richest families, also the seat of the city council, which was the most important governing institution outside the handful of major capitals. Urban centers were given the legal rank of village, town, or city, each under the jurisdiction of higher-ranked centers nearby, all reporting to the handful of major capitals such as Lima, Mexico City, Bogotá, and Buenos Aires. The Portuguese gave less emphasis to the creation of model cities in Brazil, partly because their principal export product, sugar, was agricultural. Still, cities were the only places in Spanish America or Brazil where white people could socialize mostly with each other, places where a tiny minority could maintain a basically European culture.

The attempt to recreate Spain or Portugal in colonial cities ultimately failed. Many indigenous and mestizo people, as well as blacks, both free and enslaved, became city dwellers. From the very

A GUAMAN POMA DRAWING denounces Spanish exploitation in the early 1600s. Here, a royal administrator, a parish priest, a notary, and other representatives of Spanish power (portrayed as savage beasts) menace a kneeling Indian. *Werner Forman/Art Resource, New York.*

beginning, the impact of colonization had shaken some indigenous people loose from their native communities and forced them to migrate. Some went to the mines or Spanish estates. Some built simple housing on the outskirts of colonial cities—Latin America's first suburban shantytowns. Torn away from their cultural roots, indigenous migrants had to regrow them in new environments, as did those other forced migrants, enslaved Africans. Urban slaves enjoyed greater freedom of association than did plantation slaves. Urban slaves could locate and socialize with people from the same part of Africa. Urban slaves could also join free black people in Catholic lay brotherhoods that provided a social support group and a sense of voluntary belonging. Slaves, and free blacks too, often worked as artisans (bakers or carpenters, for instance), and artisans came in all colors. As mestizos, free blacks, and poor whites rubbed elbows at a shoemaker's bench or in a blacksmith's shop, they were inventing Latin American popular culture.

Outside the cities, people of European descent were few and colonial institutions, almost non existent. Native and African cultures dominated life in the countryside by simple demographic weight. The white people of the countryside were too few and far between to socialize, or marry, exclusively with each other. Rural people of Spanish and Portuguese descent, even when they maintained a house in town, thus acquired indigenous habits and African tastes sooner than did their urban counterparts. If transculturation happened on profitable Brazilian sugar plantations, where export earnings could pay for imported clothing, wine, and even food, it happened even more on haciendas, the less profitable sort of large estate more typical of Spanish America. Rather than investing huge sums in an enslaved workforce, haciendas relied on indigenous workers, who earned a small salary or shared the harvest. Instead of crops for export to Europe, haciendas produced for local consumption. And as a rule, hacienda owners who had little to sell to Europe could afford few imported European goods. On rare visits to town, their speech, clothing, and behavior seemed (from the point of view of their urban cousins) rustically tinged with indigenous or African influences.

The indigenous and African-descended people of the countryside preserved more of their own cultures than did their city cousins. Accepting indigenous and African cultural influences in church festivities became habitual among missionaries trying to attract indigenous people to Christianity. Rural indigenous people, when compared with those in the city, had more chance to live apart, in their own villages, speaking Quechua or Quiché or Aymara or Nahuatl and following their own traditions. Plantation slaves worked in gangs, associating mostly with each other, and were often locked down at night. Urban slaves became fluent in Portuguese much more quickly than their country cousins. This is why the countryside of colonial Latin America seemed so exotic to European travelers. They dismissed the cities as second-rate imitations of Europe, while the countryside was a world apart, not Spanish or Portuguese, not indigenous or African, but a fusion of various elements, varying from region to region in kaleidoscopic combinations.

For Latin America's subjugated majorities, transculturation was both a blessing and a curse. Colonial masters and servants became a bit more like each other, seemingly a positive result. But by refashioning Spanish or Portuguese culture in their own likeness, the subjugated more easily consented to the basic ideology of colonization and, therefore, moved more firmly under colonial control. El Inca Garcilaso and Guamán Poma, two spokesmen for the native people of Peru, wrote books advancing some indigenous perspectives, but they did so while strongly endorsing Christianity and Spanish rule. The Jesuit António Vieira, who has been called the Las Casas of Brazil, exemplifies the same paradox. Vieira was one of the most famous intellectuals of the 1600s. In fact, it was a polemical publication by Vieira that Sor Juana made the mistake of refuting too brilliantly for her own good. Vieira traveled back and forth between Brazil and Portugal, preaching fiery sermons. He studied both Tupi and the language of Angola. He tried to protect the indigenous people against the Portuguese settlers. He defended the humanity and worth of African slaves. Vieira preached that "Brazil has its body in America and its soul in Angola," but he also called on slaves to endure slavery with a good

heart and await their reward in the Christian heaven. Vieira had some African heritage of his own, through his grandmother; slaves who heard him preach no doubt found him more convincing for that reason.