

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

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The Age of Exploration 1500–1800

Lesson 3 Colonial Latin America

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What are the effects of political and economic expansion?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

labor people with all their abilities and efforts; work performed by people that provides the goods or services in an economy

draft to select for some purpose; to conscript

Content Vocabulary

peninsulare a person born on the Iberian Peninsula; typically, a Spanish or Portuguese official who resided temporarily in Latin America for political and economic gain and then returned to Europe

creole a person of European descent born in Latin America and living there permanently

mestizo a person of mixed European and Native American descent

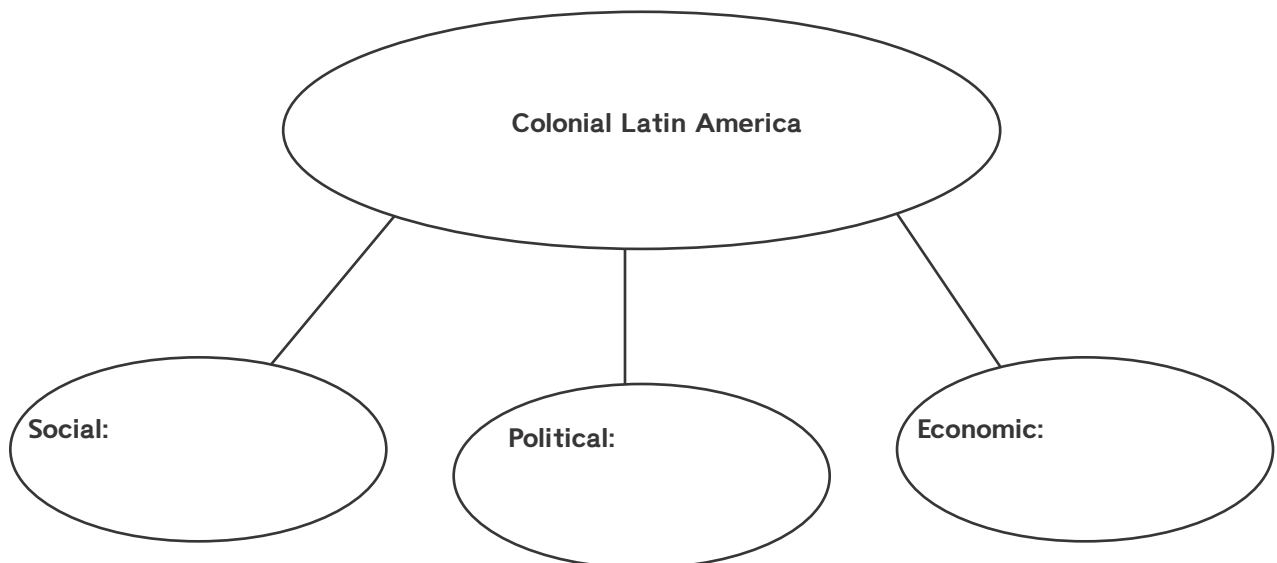
mulatto a person of mixed African and European descent

encomienda a system of labor the Spanish used in the Americas; Spanish landowners had the right, as granted by Queen Isabella, to use Native Americans as laborers

mita a labor system that the Spanish administrators in Peru used to draft native people to work

TAKING NOTES: *Organizing Information*

ACTIVITY Use this graphic organizer to summarize the political, economic, and social characteristics of colonial Latin America.



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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Latin America lasted from the early 1500s to the early 1800s. The Latin American colonies were rich in gold, silver, and other resources. They sent many of their riches and resources to the two European nations. The colonization of Latin America led to many changes both for the native peoples of the area and for the outsiders who settled there. The interactions of native peoples, enslaved Africans, and Spanish colonists created new social classes (different groups in society). The Catholic Church had a great influence in the region during the colonial period.

Colonial Empires in Latin America

Guiding Question *What were the social characteristics of colonial Latin America?*

In the sixteenth century, Spain and Portugal began to take control of the lands in Latin America that they had conquered. Spain established a huge colonial empire. It included most of South America and parts of Central America and North America. At the same time, Portugal became the ruler of Brazil. Within the lands of Central and South America, a new civilization began, which we call Latin America. The name comes from the main languages of the region, which are Spanish and Portuguese. Both these languages come from Latin.

Social Classes

The colonies copied the culture and the social patterns of their parent countries. Colonial Latin America was divided into a number of social classes. Classes are groups of people, typically with about the same social power and wealth. At the top of colonial society were **peninsulares**, who were Spanish and Portuguese officials born in Europe. They were called *peninsulares* because they came from the Iberian Peninsula (the part of Europe with Spain and Portugal). The *peninsulares* held all the important government jobs. Below them were the **creoles**. These were children of Europeans, but they were born in Latin America.

The creoles resented the *peninsulares*, who held power. They felt that the *peninsulares* looked down on them as inferior and did not consider them equals.

Below the *peninsulares* and creoles were many groups that were multiracial. The Spanish and Portuguese in Latin America lived with Native Americans and Africans. Many Native Americans were forced to work in mines and on plantations. However, there were not enough Native Americans to do all the work. So, enslaved Africans were also used for labor (work). During the next three centuries, as many as 8 million enslaved Africans were brought to Latin America.

Spanish rulers allowed marriage between Europeans and Native Americans. The children of such marriages became known as the **mestizos**. The children of Africans and Europeans were called **mulattoes**. More groups resulted from unions between mestizos and mulattoes and between Native Americans and Africans. All these various groups lived together and made Latin America home to a unique multiracial society.

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The *peninsulares* and creoles thought all these multiethnic groups were inferior to them and of a lower social class. However, over time, mestizos grew in numbers and improved their social status. Some mestizos became artisans and merchants in cities. Others became farmers or ranchers. The groups at the very bottom of the social classes were the Africans and conquered Native Americans.

Economic Foundations

One source of wealth for Portuguese and Spain came from taking natural resources from the land. The most important of these natural resources were gold and silver. The large supply of these precious metals from Latin America helped Spain pay for its wars. Spain also used the profits from the precious metals to colonize more places.

Farming became a more lasting source of wealth for the Spanish and Portuguese than the use of natural resources. Spanish and Portuguese landowners created huge farms. However, some colonial farming practices damaged the land. These practices included deforestation, overgrazing, and overgrowing of just one crop for export.

The Spanish used the **encomienda** system to make sure they always had enough workers. In this system, Spanish landowners forced Native Americans to pay taxes and provide **labor**. In return, the landowners had to protect the Native Americans and teach them about the Catholic religion. In Peru, the Spanish used the **mita**. This system allowed authorities to **draft** (force in service) native labor to work in the silver mines.

The *encomienda* system was made up of landowners and the peasants who were totally dependent on them. The system became a basic part of Latin American society, but it had some very bad effects. The terrible working conditions on the *encomiendas* helped lead to a large decrease in the Native American population. This decrease led to the use of enslaved Africans as workers. The Catholic priest Bartolomé de Las Casas (bar•to•lo•MAY day lahs CAH•sahs) spoke out against the *encomienda* in his work *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. In it, he explained that under the system, the Spanish treated Native Americans very cruelly and overworked them. Some Spanish considered the Native Americans animals, not humans. In addition, many landowners did not teach Native Americans the Christian religion or give them time to practice their religion.

Trade was another way for the Spanish and Portuguese to make money. In addition to gold and silver, they shipped sugar, tobacco, diamonds, and animal hides from the colonies to Europe. In return, the Europeans supplied the colonists with manufactured goods. Spain and Portugal regulated to keep other countries out of this trade. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the British and French got more and more powerful. They could not be kept out of these money-making markets.

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Reading Progress Check

Drawing Conclusions What were the two key factors in determining status in colonial Latin America?

State and Church

Guiding Question *How did Portugal and Spain govern their colonies to promote economic gain and exert their authority?*

The Portuguese and Spanish colonial empires in Latin America lasted more than 300 years. Communication and travel between the Americas and Europe were slow and difficult at that time. European rulers could not keep a great deal of control over their overseas empires. As a result, colonial officials in Latin America had a great deal of freedom in carrying out imperial policies.

Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, the Portuguese monarchy began to try to get more control over Brazil. The position of governor general (later called a viceroy) was created to govern the colony. The governor general was the head of a bureaucracy, a group of officials who ran and administered government. The governor-general was the monarch's representative in the colony. But it was not a perfect system. In reality, the governor-general had little control over the local officials who directly governed Brazil's districts.

To rule his American empire, the Spanish king appointed viceroys. The first viceroy was established for New Spain (Mexico) in 1535. Another was appointed for Peru in 1543. In the eighteenth century, two more viceroyalties (colonies ruled by a viceroy) were added. Under the viceroys, Spaniards held all major government positions.

From the time of the conquest of the New World, Spanish and Portuguese rulers wanted to persuade the native peoples to follow Christianity. This policy gave the Catholic Church a powerful role in the society and culture of Latin America.

Catholic missionaries spread across Latin America. These missionaries included members of the Dominican, Franciscan, and Jesuit religious orders. The missionaries brought Native Americans together into villages, or missions. This allowed them to reach many people at once. There the natives were converted to Christianity, taught trades, and encouraged to grow crops.

Missions allowed missionaries to control the lives of the Native Americans. They helped make the native peoples docile members of the empire. The Jesuits started more than 30 missions in the region of Paraguay. The Jesuits made their missions into businesses that made a profit.

The Catholic Church also built cathedrals, hospitals, and schools in the colonies. These schools gave Native American students a basic education in the Spanish or Portuguese language and grammar. The students were also prepared for a higher-level education in Church schools.

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The Catholic Church offered women a choice other than marriage as a role in society. Women could enter convents and become nuns. Women in religious orders often lived well. Some came from wealthy aristocratic families. Many nuns worked outside of convents. They often ran schools and hospitals. One of these women was the Mexican nun Juana Inés de la Cruz (WAHN•ah ee•NAYS de la KROOS). She wrote poetry and prose, and she encouraged women be educated.



Reading Progress Check

Applying What role did the Catholic Church play in the colonization of Latin America?
