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James Mahoney
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# Colonialism and Postcolonial Development

In this comparative-historical analysis of Spanish America, James Mahoney offers a new theory of colonialism and postcolonial development. The book explores why certain kinds of societies are subject to certain kinds of colonialism and why these forms of colonialism give rise to countries with differing levels of economic prosperity and social well-being. Mahoney contends that differences in the extent of colonialism are best explained by the potentially evolving fit between the institutions of the colonizing nation and those of the colonized society. Moreover, he shows how institutions forged under colonialism bring countries to relative levels of development that may prove remarkably enduring in the postcolonial period. The argument is sure to stir discussion and debate, both among experts on Spanish America who believe that development is not tightly bound by the colonial past and among scholars of colonialism who suggest that the institutional identity of the colonizing nation is of little consequence.

James Mahoney is Fitzgerald professor of economic history and a professor of political science and sociology at Northwestern University. He is the author of *The Legacies of Liberalism: Path Dependence and Political Regimes in Central America* (2001), which received the Barrington Moore Jr. Prize of the Comparative and Historical Section of the American Sociological Association. He is also coeditor of *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (2003), which received the Giovanni Sartori Book Award of the Qualitative Methods Section of the American Political Science Association. Mahoney is a past president of the Section on Qualitative and Multi-Method Research of the American Political Science Association and Chair-Elect of the Section on Comparative and Historical Sociology of the American Sociological Association.

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# Advance Praise for *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development*

"James Mahoney brings an unprecedented rigor to the analysis of the long-term, rising and falling, developmental (mis)fortunes of the nations of mainland Latin America. The region's historians had long been aware of "The Great Reversal," whereby today's descendants of the great pre-Columbian Inca and Aztec empires have fallen far behind their regional peers in our measurements of human well-being and economic development. Mahoney now tells us, with exquisite (yet accessible) theoretical and methodological clarity and scholarly care, why those two developmental routes crossed paths roughly two centuries ago. He especially relates those changes to the greatly varied intensities with which Spain (and Portugal) first established their mercantilist forms of rule over many regions, and to how those patterns of ruling were reformed in the late colonial period, in that process shifting again the developmental arcs of Latin American nations along new and varied pathways. In my view, he has now put to eternal rest any and all theories that would collapse Latin regional (under)developmental arcs into a singular pattern, and throws down the gantlet before his many, yet less persuasive, theoretical competitors. All future analyses of long-term Latin American development, including my own, must henceforth deal with this well-researched and wide-ranging epic of a book."

– Timothy Wickham-Crowley, Georgetown University

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# Colonialism and Postcolonial Development

## Spanish America in Comparative Perspective

JAMES MAHONEY
*Northwestern University*

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*Dedicated to my mother, Maureen Mahoney,*
*and to the memory of my father, Elmer Lee Mahoney*

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# Preface

Comparative-historical analysis achieves its potential when it generates new theoretical insights of broad utility *and* novel understandings of particular cases. Focused on questions of colonialism and postcolonial development, this book seeks to realize the dual promise of comparative-historical analysis. It offers a general theory for explaining variations in colonialism and long-run development among non-European countries. And it uses this theory, along with other analytical principles, to work out a new explanation of colonial and postcolonial experiences specifically for fifteen mainland countries of Spanish America.

The book's argument takes issue with certain assumptions embedded in leading geographical and institutional explanations of development, offering alternative and more historically oriented frames of reference in their place. It insists that to explain forms of colonialism, one must look at the *interaction* between the potentially evolving political-economic institutions of the colonizing nation and the societal institutions in the colonized territory, which also may change over time. And to make sense of the consequences of colonialism for development, the book argues, one must pay special attention to the collective actors that are born out of colonialism and whose capacities will vary depending on the kinds and extent of colonial institutions that were implanted. When applied to Spanish America, the approach yields a new account of why certain territories were subjected to more or less colonialism across different eras and why these alternative colonial experiences gave rise to new nations with contrasting levels of economic and social development.

The ideas in this book have been germinating for nearly as long as I have been engaging social science questions. When I was an undergraduate student at the University of Minnesota, the lectures of August Nimtz introduced me to the power of arguments attributing developmental paths to modes of colonial domination. Concurrently, classes with Kathryn Sikkink piqued my interest in Latin America and pointed me to Guillermo O'Donnell's work on modernization and authoritarianism, which suggested the possibility of long-run continuities in relative levels of economic and social development. These experiences, I can now see, planted in my mind the basic insight that



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variations in colonialism might explain why Latin American countries today exhibit strikingly different levels of socioeconomic development.

Yet I did not begin any actual work on colonial legacies and long-run development for many years. More than anything else, political events in the world conspired to direct my research elsewhere. While I was at Minnesota, the revolutionary movements in Latin America charged my emotions and captivated my imagination; I wrote my senior honors thesis on the causes of social revolutions in Central America and the Caribbean. Then, when I pursued graduate study at the University of California, Berkeley, the "third wave" of democratization swept across the globe, refocusing my scholarly energies toward issues of democracy and authoritarianism. I wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the historical roots of contrasting political regimes in Central America, which became the foundation for my first book, *The Legacies of Liberalism: Path Dependence and Political Regimes in Central America* (2001).

During the summer of 2000, I finally started this research on colonialism and development. Meanwhile, as it turned out, the second Gulf War and the subsequent U.S. occupation of Iraq meant that I was soon again working in line with world events. Across the social sciences, exciting new research aimed at explaining colonialism and postcolonial development was taking place. As I read this burgeoning literature, I came to see more clearly the methodological differences between the comparative-historical approach that I was employing and the cross-national regression techniques that were often used in other work. Though it may have delayed this project a bit, I could not resist writing articles aimed at explicating these differences. For those who know my writings on methodology, it will come as no surprise to hear that I believe comparative-historical analysis offers an especially powerful approach for explaining why particular cases experience specific outcomes (as opposed to estimating the average effects of causes). In this book, though, my purpose is not to advocate on behalf of comparative-historical research by abstractly spelling out its distinctive methodological features. Insofar as the book makes a case for comparative-historical analysis, it tries to do so by showing that the approach can anchor a valid explanation of processes of colonialism and postcolonial development in Spanish America as they have actually occurred historically.

I had the topic and method worked out early; it remained for me to do the research and write the book. I greatly underestimated just how difficult that would be, especially establishing a historical grasp over fifteen different Spanish American countries across very long periods of time. It took years of reading books and articles before I felt comfortable writing case narratives that were simultaneously sensitive to historical realities and consistent with an overarching theoretical argument. In fact, however, it was very fortunate that the historiography had become so voluminous over the last two or three decades; otherwise, I would not have had enough basic information to

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make the arguments here. Moreover, my reading of histories and my quest to establish a command over many cases soon became a labor of love. It instilled great purpose into my work over the last several years.

As an unanticipated result of this effort, I often came away from the books and articles that I was reading with profound admiration for the historians who produced them. Through their mastery of times and places, exceeding my own for every country covered in this book, the best historians make original interpretations that change the way we think about both individual cases and general processes. My own goals in writing this book are, of course, quite different from what most historians set out to achieve. I do not try to offer a novel argument using fresh archival material or by assembling already-discovered primary sources in new ways. Rather, throughout the book, I rely on historians' works themselves as my sources of information, drawing especially on points of consensus and, whenever possible, accounts about which there is little controversy. Precisely because this book builds so thoroughly on preexisting evidence and established interpretations of individual cases, the basic facts discussed below will not be much in the way of "news" to the relevant specialists. Instead, my ambition is to use systematic comparisons, new theoretical ideas, and the explicit assessment of alternative causal arguments to arrange mostly uncontested facts into a new and valid explanation. Comparative-historical analysis is that mode of research in which investigators contribute to historical understanding on the basis of broad comparisons and the conscious engagement of theory with fine-grained evidence. When comparative-historical analysts are successful, their findings can complement those of the historians on whose research they inevitably depend.

Most of the work for this book was completed in the solitude of my offices at Brown University (before fall 2005) and Northwestern University (after fall 2005). But it was in contact with students and colleagues that I was inspired to do much of my best thinking. Let me therefore acknowledge the people whose support and suggestions helped me to move this project from conception to completion.

I would first of all like to recognize the talented graduate students who collaborated with me in their roles as research assistants or as coauthors on papers and articles related to this project. My heartfelt thanks go to Jennifer Darrah, Diego Finchelstein, Carlos Freytes, Aaron Katz, Matthew Lange, Jennifer Rosen, Celso Villegas, and Matthias vom Hau. This group knows probably better than anyone else the research that went into this book and the feelings of excitement and occasional dismay that it brought to me. I also received very helpful comments from the following students: Jennifer Cyr, Christopher R. Day, Jesse Dillon Savage, Andrew Kelly, Armando Lara-Millan, Erin Metz McDonnell, Elizabeth Onasch, Madeline Otis, and Robert Rapoport. In thanking these individuals, I need to acknowledge the

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support provided by the National Science Foundation. In 2001, when Joane Nagel and Patricia White worked as the NSF Sociology Program directors, I received a Career Award grant that provided financial support for travel and research over a five-year period. Without this grant, I would never have been able to follow through on this study.

Many colleagues in history, political science, and sociology commented on draft chapters and related papers. In most cases I heeded their good advice, but sometimes I may not have been able to address their concerns. Let me therefore thank the following individuals without implying their agreement with all aspects of my argument: Jeremy Adelman, Ruth Berins Collier, Miguel Centeno, John Coatsworth, Frank Dobbin, Susan Eckstein, Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas, John Gerring, Gary Goertz, Jeffrey Herbst, José Itzigsohn, Steven Levitsky, Mara Loveman, Shannon O'Neil, Charles C. Ragin, James Robinson, Ben Ross Schneider, Kenneth Shadlen, Thomas Skidmore, Richard Snyder, Hillel Soifer, and the late Charles Tilly. I also received helpful feedback during presentations of this material at Arizona State University, Brown University, Cornell University, the University of Florida, Harvard University, New York University, Northwestern University, the University of Notre Dame, the University of Pennsylvania, and Princeton University. Although I cannot individually thank all of the professors and graduate students who asked questions or made suggestions at these presentations, I can at least point out that they profoundly shaped my thinking.

I was fortunate to receive extensive and vital feedback on the first nearly full draft of the book at a workshop in November 2007 at the University of Washington. This workshop was Margaret Levi's magnificent "Seattle Seminar," in which prospective authors of the Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics series are invited to have their draft manuscripts discussed over a two-day period. I benefited enormously from the event, and especially from the comments of Maureen Eger, Robert Fishman, Anthony Gill, Stephen E. Hansen, Edgar Kiser, Margaret Levi, Steven Pfaff, Audrey Sacks, and Rebecca Szper. At about that time, Ben Ross Schneider also gave the whole manuscript an extremely close reading that rescued me from many errors and pointed me in promising new directions. After I revised the manuscript in light of these comments, it was finally ready for review. At Cambridge University Press, Lewis Bateman served as a wonderfully supportive editor and arranged for referee reports from which I benefited. The very talented Nancy Trotic did a magnificent job with the copyediting. For help in making the maps, I am grateful to David Cox and Erin Kimball.

My career trajectory has taken me from graduate school in political science at Berkeley to the faculty of the Sociology Department at Brown University to my current joint position in the departments of Political Science and Sociology at Northwestern University. At each stop, I have acquired one or two prominent supporters who helped me in ways that I cannot begin

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to measure. For believing in me, let me thank David Collier, Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Kathleen Thelen. I also need to thank my close colleagues Bruce Carruthers, Edward Gibson, Patrick Heller, Ann Shola Orloff, and Monica Prasad for encouraging me with this project and all my efforts on matters comparative and historical. Although Theda Skocpol was neither my mentor nor my colleague, she is one of my intellectual heroes, and I hope that readers will appreciate just how deeply her ideas have influenced this book.

Finally, of course, let me thank my family. My wife, Sharon Kamra, deserves my gratitude above all, for she had to live with the preoccupied professor. Sharon has a full-time career as a project director, but it was her expert management of our household that enabled me to attend to my research and still spend lots of time engaged with our wonderful children, Maya and Alexander. My mother has been a constant source of encouragement and love for my family; she is, to me, the most dependable person in the world. The memory of my father also continues to inspire me, for he was nothing if not the world's most committed perfectionist. As I now complete this book, I can see some of my mom's work ethic in myself. And I needed it, because – for better or worse – I also inherited some of my dad's yearning to try to get things just right.

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