Latin America in Colonial Times

Second edition

Few milestones in human history are as momentous as the meeting of three great civilizations on American soil in the sixteenth century. The fully – revised textbook Latin America in Colonial Times presents that story in an engaging but informative new package, revealing how a new civilization and region – Latin America – emerged from that encounter. The authors give equal attention to the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors and settlers, to the African slaves they brought across the Atlantic, and to the indigenous peoples whose lands were invaded. From the dawn of empires in the fifteenth century, through the conquest age of the sixteenth century and the end of empire in the nineteenth century, the book combines broad brush strokes with anecdotal details that bring the era to life. This new edition incorporates the newest scholarship on Spain, Portugal, and Atlantic Africa, in addition to Latin America itself, with indigenous and African views and women's experiences and contributions to colonial society highlighted throughout.

Matthew Restall is the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Latin American History and Director of Latin American Studies at Penn State. Since 1995 he has published some sixty articles and essays and twenty books. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Library of Congress, the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and the Leverhulme Trust in the UK. He edited Ethnohistory journal for a decade, and is now co-editor of the Hispanic American Historical Review and co-editor of the Cambridge Latin American Studies book series.

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LATIN AMERICA IN COLONIAL TIMES

Second edition

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CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS “SAILED FROM SPAIN,” wrote one Spaniard in the sixteenth century, “to mix the world together and give to those strange lands the form of our own.” That mixing of the world together, or “the discovery of the new world,” as Europeans of the day put it, was characterized by the Paduan philosopher Buonamico in 1539 as the greatest achievement of human history, comparable “not only to Antiquity, but to immortality.” In various forms that sentiment has been repeated many times during the past five centuries; one historian recently called the European discovery and conquest of America and its native peoples “the most astonishing encounter of our history.”

With as many motivations as there were individuals, men and women sailed across the Atlantic Ocean seeking power, wealth, social status, religious mission, scientific knowledge, and personal adventure. At the same time, they often failed to recognize that the lands they claimed as their own were already occupied. Tens of millions of Native Americans had over thousands of years developed sophisticated societies from which the newcomers could learn a great deal. Yet, despite European attempts to reshape the Americas into known forms, Native Americans – and the millions of Africans brought against their will by Europeans – contributed as much as willing newcomers did to the formation of colonial societies. Native American foods, meanwhile, such as maize, potatoes, chocolate, and chili peppers, quickly revolutionized world cuisine and spurred population growth.

This book tells the story of that astonishing encounter among Iberians, Africans, and Native Americans – and then examines the many regional stories and general social and economic patterns that developed in its aftermath. But the book does more than simply tell stories about colonial Latin America. Our concern is also with the question that has been raised as often as the “discovery” has been called history’s greatest event – the question of how. How had Europeans come to think that they could simply “give to those strange lands the form of their own”? How were so few
Preface: The Colonial Crucible

Spaniards able to conquer the great and powerful empires of the Aztecs and the Incas? How were small numbers of Spanish and Portuguese settlers able to build, maintain, and defend such vast colonies across three hundred years?

The answer is simple: they did not; or at least, they did not do it alone. Europeans neither embarked on conquests nor created colonies without substantial contributions from non-Europeans. In both endeavors, they were accompanied and assisted by much more numerous Native Americans and sub-Saharan Africans. Such peoples were usually – but not always – subject to Spanish and Portuguese rule and exploitation. But European settlers were very much dependent on the Native Americans and Africans who consistently outnumbered them. Colonial Latin American societies were not segregated; they were crucibles in which many peoples and cultures mixed and changed one another. It was therefore not only Spaniards and Portuguese who gave form to colonial Latin America but also the Mexica and the Maya, Quechua and Tupi speakers, Yorubas and Congolese, and many others.

Our narrative journey through the great encounter and into the mixed-together world – the crucible – of colonial Latin America takes the form of fifteen chapters. In Chapters 1–3, we look at what historians now call the Atlantic world, as it was when the ocean divided, rather than bridged, the Eastern and Western hemispheres. The civilizations of native America; the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal); and western, or “Atlantic,” Africa, are each introduced in turn.

In Chapters 4–7, the peoples of the Atlantic continents are brought together, beginning with the birth of Spain and its imperial ambitions, Portuguese expansion into the Atlantic and toward Asia, and the 1492 voyage of Columbus that grew from those Portuguese and Spanish roots. The story continues with the experience of Spaniards, Native Americans, and Africans in the Caribbean in the decades after 1492. We then cross to the American mainland to explore the nature of native empires on the eve of the Spanish invasion, the events and patterns of that invasion, the roles played by Native Americans and Africans, and the birth of a Portuguese colony in Brazil. The sum of these transformative events is here called the Long Conquest.

The book is less chronological and more thematic in Chapters 8–12. These chapters paint a social portrait of colonial Spanish America and Brazil from the time when colonial rule began in the sixteenth century through to the early eighteenth century, when change began to gather pace. We have dubbed this period the “colonial middle.” These chapters give support to the assertion that Native Americans and Africans played indispensable and central roles in the formation and florescence of Spanish and Portuguese colonial societies, as these roles are examined in detail alongside the efforts and endeavors of Iberian settlers.
The final part of the book, “The Age of Change,” shifts back to chronology, as the period treated—roughly 1750–1825—was marked by momentous events, culminating in independence. Chapters 13–15 trace the growing pressures of war and administrative reform in an era when colonial society was increasingly complex, growing in size and wealth, and otherwise changing. Imperial administrators struggled to reorder colonial power structures and to generally raise taxes, all against the wishes of colonial subjects. Dissenters included Iberians descended from early settler and conquistador families, along with some Native Americans and mixed people of color. A spate of regional revolts laid bare the fault lines of colonial society. Despite widespread dissatisfaction with late colonial reforms, the Latin American colonies remained faithful to Spain and Portugal into the early nineteenth century, when they were overtaken by a combination of events in Europe and local discontent. Led by able commanders such as Simón Bolívar, the colonies at last became independent nations.

At the book’s close, we revisit our argument as to how Latin America’s fabled conquests—followed by some three centuries of largely unchallenged, transoceanic colonial rule—were possible. We summarize and conclude by reiterating the importance of the complementary roles played by Iberians, Africans, and Native Americans in both processes. It is our firm belief that conquest and colonialism succeeded despite what seem in retrospect to have been very long odds, because both were perceived—most importantly by indigenous, black, and mixed-race participants—as shared ventures. On the flip side, understanding how this widespread acquiescence to Iberian invasion and long-term rule came about and functioned in the Americas is fundamental before attempting to interpret rebellions and other forms of resistance, including the final push to independence.

In 1566, St. Francis Borja sent a present of a globe to his son (who was himself the father of a future viceroy of Peru); the son wrote back, “Before seeing it, I had not realized how small is the world.” The world had indeed become small and, as another observer had said, “mixed,” within a few generations of Columbus’ famous transatlantic voyage, shrinking the distance among European, African, Asian, and American peoples while expanding both the threat of conflict and the potential for human growth. Colonists did not succeed in giving European form to American lands, but nor did America remain the same. Conquest and colonization made America near in the European consciousness but very far from its people in practice.

Our subject, the history of colonial Latin America, may seem as vast as the world once did to Borja. Our hope is that this book will render it, like Borja’s globe did the world, manageably small but still wondrous.
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