

Revolution and Consolidation in North and South America

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During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the colonies of the New World—the possessions of European powers for three centuries—threw off the ties that bound them politically and economically to their home countries. The **American Revolution**, the **Haitian Rebellion**, and the **Latin American wars of independence** were all part of the great wave of revolutions, including the French Revolution, that struck the Atlantic world during this era.

However, their results differed greatly. In the north, the American Revolution created an economic and political powerhouse: the United States, the modern world's first major nation to become a democracy, steadily expanded across the continent. Despite internal troubles, even wars, concerning slavery and the suppression of Native Americans, it grew in size and might. Like the nations of Europe, it industrialized. Already by the early 1800s, the United States was the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere. By the end of the century, it had acquired overseas territories of its own and was on the threshold of becoming a world power.

As for Latin America, revolution brought freedom, but did not create nations as well equipped to deal with freedom as the United States was. Despite high ideals, most of the new Latin American nations were plagued by dictatorial politics, economic backwardness, poverty, racial prejudice, and frequent revolutions and civil conflicts. In addition, the great power to the north, the United States, became increasingly involved in Latin American economics and politics, and not always for the better.

- *Slavery*: The persistence of **slavery in the American South** was a key factor in allowing the Atlantic slave trade to continue for so long. It was the underlying cause of the U.S. Civil War (1861–1865).
- *Industrial growth*: During the last two thirds of the 1800s, the United States not only followed Europe in industrializing but surpassed it. Many of the era's key innovations and inventions came from the United States. Also, by the end of the 1800s, America was poised to become the greatest economic power in the world. It was overtaking Europe's strongest industrial powers, Britain and Germany, in many economic sectors.
- *Immigration*: America's reputation as a land of freedom and economic opportunity drew millions of **immigrants** from Europe and Asia during the 1800s. Between the 1830s and 1890s, an estimated 17 million people came to settle in the United States. Immigrants continued to arrive during the early 1900s. Combined with the large numbers of Europeans and Asians who emigrated to Latin America during these years, this development had a tremendous demographic effect on the geographic balance of world population. **Anti-immigration sentiment** was common, especially against non-whites.

Developments in Canada

Canada, the other British colony in North America, underwent changes during the 1800s. Although Canada remained loyal during the American Revolution, a desire for greater autonomy made itself felt not long afterward. Armed uprisings took place in 1837 and 1838. Although they failed, they convinced the British that flexibility was called for. In 1840, Upper Canada (now Ontario) and Lower Canada (now Quebec), along with other territories in the east, joined together as the United Provinces of Canada. However, they were not self-governing.

More independence came in the 1860s. Canadian politician John Macdonald became the leader of the country's freedom movement. Thanks largely to his efforts, not to mention British fears that a disgruntled Canada might grow closer to the United States, Britain's government, in 1867, conferred upon Canada **dominion status**, entitling Canada to its own constitution and parliament. The constitution created a confederation of Upper and Lower Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.

The British monarch was still the head of state, and, for the time being, foreign affairs were still controlled by Britain. Still, in most respects, Canada was self-governing. John Macdonald became the first prime minister. Later, Great Britain used the scheme of dominion status to give similar autonomy to Australia and New Zealand.

THE HAITIAN REBELLION

A key moment in the spread of the Atlantic revolutions to Latin America and the Caribbean was the **Haitian Rebellion** (1791–1804), the only large-scale slave revolt to succeed in the New World. The Haitian Rebellion was inspired in large part by the American Revolution and caused directly by events related to the French Revolution.

The island of Haiti, known then as Saint Domingue, had been colonized by the Spanish and French. Each ruled half of the island, whose economy was based on sugar and coffee. The French half was populated by a mix of French colonists, Creoles (those of French descent but born in the colonies), free blacks (known as *gens de couleur*), mulattos, and half a million black slaves. When the French Revolution began in 1789, it threw French Haiti into chaos, mainly because the white colonists and free blacks, who competed over Haiti's sugar economy, quarreled. Free blacks and mulattos received equal rights in May 1791 (losing them temporarily between September 1791 and March 1792), but slaves, who remained unfree, rebelled in August 1791.

By 1793, **François Toussaint L'Ouverture**, often referred to as the Black Washington, was leading the revolt. L'Ouverture was literate, well-read, and a talented commander. The French government ended slavery in 1794, but L'Ouverture's goal was now full independence and the liberation of slaves on the Spanish side of the island, which he crossed into in 1798. At this point, L'Ouverture hoped to make Haiti a country for free blacks that would be friendly to France but self-governing.

Unfortunately for L'Ouverture, the French had no intention of letting Haiti go free. Over the next four years, the French debated the Haitian question. Then, in 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte decided to send troops to retake Haiti for France. Ironically, while a young officer in France's revolutionary army, Napoleon had been an admirer of L'Ouverture, but now the two men were enemies.

The French captured L'Ouverture and sent him back to France, where he died in prison. However, the French, unused to tropical warfare, failed to conquer the Haitian rebels. Yellow fever killed over 40,000 French troops. In 1804, the French went home in disgrace, and the independent nation of Haiti was born.

The Haitian Rebellion inspired rebellion elsewhere in Latin America and had one other far-reaching effect. Because of his frustration with the fighting in Haiti, Napoleon decided not to maintain major colonies in the New World. To this point, France had been the master of central North America: the large Louisiana territory, stretching from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi Delta. In 1803, Napoleon sold it at a bargain price to the United States President Thomas Jefferson, who, unlike Napoleon, recognized that the **Louisiana Purchase** would allow the United States to control the North American continent. By helping to convince Napoleon to sell Louisiana, the Haitian Rebellion brought about a major shift in global power.

THE LATIN AMERICAN WARS OF INDEPENDENCE

From 1810 to 1825, Mexico, Central America, and South America gained their independence from Spain and Portugal. As with the American Revolution, reasons for the **Latin American wars of independence** included a growing sense of national identity and local resentment of Spanish and Portuguese economic policies. Also important was the frustration that the European-descended, or *criollo* ("creole"), upper and middle classes felt toward the rigid social hierarchy of Latin American societies, which prevented them from realizing their goal of upward social and economic mobility. Even before the revolutions began, tensions were brewing.

The spark that set off the Latin American revolutions was lit by Napoleon back in Europe. Between 1807 and 1809, Napoleon invaded Spain and Portugal, toppling

THE CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

Understanding how and why revolutions take place is a daunting task for any historian. Social stress and class differences, economic inequality and poverty, incompetent or oppressive political leadership, and intellectual and cultural forces (religion, nationalism, doctrines, ideologies) are almost always at the root of any major revolution. Studying and comparing revolutions involves trying to figure out which of these is more or less important in any given case. Another important distinction has to do with whether forces causing revolution come *from above* (top-down), *from below* (bottom-up), or, as is often the case, both. Who are the actual revolutionaries? Do they continue to cooperate after the initial seizure of power, or do they disagree and quarrel among themselves, leading to further struggle?

the royal governments there. The Spanish king was placed under house arrest, while the Portuguese royal family fled to Brazil. These sudden blows to the monarchies had a swift and profound impact on Latin American politics. Brazil's transition to independence was relatively smooth. Spain's possessions, however, rose up in rebellion.

Simón Bolívar and the Liberation of Spanish South America

The most influential revolutionary was **Simón Bolívar** (1783–1830), known throughout Latin America as the Liberator. A member of the creole upper class in Venezuela, Bolívar was inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment, frustrated by the inefficiency and injustice of Spanish rule, and personally ambitious.

In 1810, Bolívar took control of the independence movement sweeping across northern South America: Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Unlike many members of the creole elite, who rebelled against Spain for the sake of their narrow class interests, Bolívar realized that no revolt could succeed unless it attracted

all classes. In a bold stroke, he promised to fight for the rights of mixed-race Latin Americans, as well as the emancipation of slaves. These principles, elaborated in documents like Bolívar's 1815 **Jamaica Letter**, turned a small and unsuccessful upper- and middle-class rebellion into a mass war of independence. The military turning point of Bolívar's wars came from 1819 to 1821, when he gained control over Venezuela and Colombia.

At this juncture, Bolívar joined forces with another freedom fighter, José de San Martín, a general turned revolutionary. Between 1816 and 1820, San Martín had freed Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Despite political differences—San Martín was more conservative—the two men decided to cooperate, with Bolívar as leader. By 1825, royalists had been cleared out of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, and Spanish South America was now free.

Brazilian Independence

In the meantime, Brazil also became independent. Here, the move toward freedom came from above, rather than below. In 1820, the king of Portugal went back to Europe to reclaim his throne. He left his son, Prince Pedro, as regent. However, he also gave Pedro this advice: "My son, if Brazil starts to demand independence, make sure you are the one to proclaim it. Then put the crown on your own head." Indeed, in 1822, when Brazilians began to agitate for freedom, Pedro declared independence, created a constitutional monarchy, and proclaimed himself Pedro I.

Mexico's War of Independence

Mexico and Central America liberated themselves as well. The **Mexican War of Independence** (1810–1823) was complicated by the inability of various social classes

to cooperate. It began in September 1810, when the priest **Miguel Hidalgo**, unfurling the flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe, called for independence from Spain. Hidalgo was killed in 1811, but his fight was carried on by another priest, **José María Morelos**. Hidalgo and Morelos fought not just for freedom from Spain but also social justice. They wanted equal rights for Indians, mestizos, and slaves (whom they planned to set free). They wanted constitutional rule. Hidalgo and Morelos's platform gained mass support from the lower classes. Unfortunately, they were opposed not just by the Spanish but many upper-class Mexicans, even those who wanted independence. Like Hidalgo, Morelos was killed, in 1815, by conservative Mexicans, not the Spanish.

Therefore, Mexico's revolt was completed by the elite, not the lower classes. A conservative colonel, Agustín Iturbide, overthrew Spanish rule in 1820–1821. He tried to establish a dictatorship, with himself as emperor, but was quickly overthrown. A Mexican republic was proclaimed in 1823, the same year that the nations of Central America, south of Mexico, established the United Provinces of Central America.

The Caribbean

Only in the Caribbean did Spain retain American colonies. Until its defeat by the United States in the Spanish-American War of 1898, it kept islands such as Cuba and Puerto Rico. Other European countries also held onto Caribbean colonies.

POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Political Difficulties in Nineteenth-Century Latin America

Before his death in 1830, Simón Bolívar commented pessimistically about the revolutions he had helped to make: "We have achieved our independence...at the expense of everything else." In and of itself, freedom did not bring about good government, social justice, or healthy economies. Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, Latin America suffered from a number of fundamental problems.

First and most immediate was political breakdown. Bolívar divided Latin America into a handful of sizable states. Almost right away, though, Bolívar's mega-confederations—such as Gran Colombia and the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata—split apart into smaller states.

Second was the failure of constitutional rule in many of these states. Bolívar drafted constitutions for more than a dozen nations. These were influenced by the Napoleonic law code and the ideals of the American and French revolutions (although they favored indirect over direct democracy). But there was little tradition of constitutional rule in Latin America, so civil liberties and political rights had little meaning.

This failing led to a third problem: the prevalence of dictatorial rule. Military or political strongmen, known as **caudillos**, often gained control of Latin American governments. They ruled by means of personal charisma, military force, or oppression. Despite the efforts of reformers and liberals, such as Mexico's Benito Juárez, who led the country from 1867 to 1872, conservative dictatorship, rather than representative government, was the rule in nineteenth-century Latin America.

Economic Backwardness

Another difficulty was economic backwardness. Hundreds of years of Spanish and Portuguese rule had geared Latin American economies to extract raw materials. They generally emphasized **monoculture** or, at best, the development of only a small set of resources. They required large reserves of slaves or cheap labor. These practices continued, as did plantation agriculture. Latin American leaders failed to diversify their economies. Profits benefited only the elite (or foreign investors), while the labor was carried out by large numbers of extremely poor peasants and workers. Latin American economies were comparatively slow to modernize and industrialize.

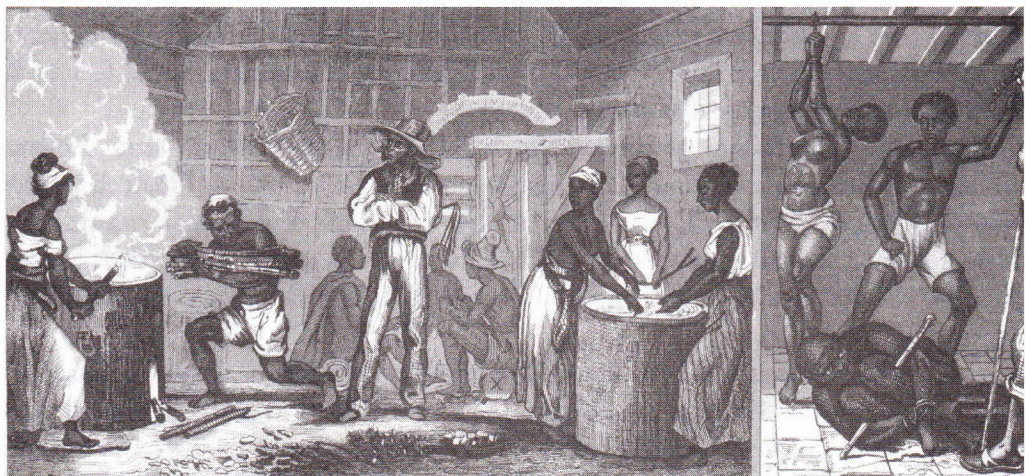
Social and Racial Divisions

Social inequality persisted. Although constitutions theoretically did away with the rigid social hierarchies put into place by the Spanish and Portuguese, people of mixed race, Indians, and blacks still experienced much prejudice. In many areas, such as Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, the Argentinian pampas, southern Chile, and Brazil's Amazon basin, racial tensions led to uprisings and guerrilla wars. Another social problem was economic inequality: the gap between rich and poor had always been wide, and it remained so or grew even wider during the 1800s. In Brazil and Cuba, slavery continued to be legal until the 1880s.

Foreign Influence over Latin America

Yet another problem was the increased influence of foreign countries over Latin American economics and even politics. This was especially the case with the United States. During the Texas rebellion of the 1830s and the **Mexican-American War** (1846–1848), the United States took vast amounts of territory from Mexico, including Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

During the 1860s, Napoleon III of France attempted to install a Habsburg emperor, Maximilian, as the ruler of Mexico.



Slavery in Brazil.

From the mid-1500s to the end of the 1800s, Brazil was the largest single importer of slaves from Africa. In particular, the sugar industry depended on slave labor. Not until the 1800s did Brazil's government make slavery illegal. Shown here are scenes of the sale and punishment of slaves in Brazil.

Less dramatically, foreign investors, especially from Britain and the United States, worked hand-in-hand with Latin American elites to control Latin American economies, then pocket the profits. This “**dollar diplomacy**” gave Britain and, later, the United States a tremendous amount of influence in the region.

Until late in the 1800s, Spain maintained a presence in the Caribbean, retaining control over islands such as Puerto Rico and Cuba. Spanish treatment of these colonies was harsh. Slavery persisted in Cuba until the 1880s. Cuban freedom movements began to appear. The most famous voice for Cuban independence was the poet José Martí. Spain responded by placing political agitators in **concentration camps**, the modern world’s first such prisons (borrowed by the British in the early 1900s, during the Boer War). Spain’s influence here ended in 1898, with the Spanish-American War.

The United States also exercised political power in the region, viewing the Americas as its sphere of influence. The **Spanish-American War** (1898) gave the United States an empire of sorts in Latin America, by placing Cuba and Puerto Rico under its protection. The United States built the **Panama Canal** in the early 1900s, another sign of its regional dominance.



TIP When the Pan-American Union formed in 1889 to promote cooperation among Latin American nations, cynics referred to it as the “Colonial Division of the U.S. State Department.”

Limited Modernization and Industrialization

Despite all these problems, Latin America modernized somewhat in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Industrialization came late, but it did come, especially in countries like Mexico and Argentina. Countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile made it possible for women to gain educations (even, in Chile, law and medical degrees), and extended greater rights to them.

Immigration from Europe and Asia swelled the populations of Latin American nations. Although countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Chile did not receive the same numbers as the United States, millions settled there during the last half of the 1800s, adding to what was already a diverse social and ethnic mix.

The Mexican Revolution

From 1910 to 1920, at roughly the same time as China and Russia, Mexico experienced one of the early twentieth century’s most significant political uprisings. The **Mexican Revolution** deposed **Porfirio Díaz**, president of Mexico between 1876 and 1910. Díaz did much to modernize and industrialize the country, but, over the years, grew corrupt and abusive. He rigged elections and hired armed thugs (known as *rurales*) to intimidate people into voting for him. When **Francisco Madero** ran against him in 1910, he put Madero in jail.

However, Madero escaped, gathered supporters, and started a mass uprising by pledging to carry out meaningful agrarian reform. In 1911, he defeated the federal armies and forced Díaz to abdicate. He attempted to create a liberal democracy, but as with the moderates in revolutionary France and Sun Yat-sen in China, he was not destined to govern for long. He found himself caught between conservative counterrevolutionaries and radicals like **Francisco “Pancho” Villa**, **Emiliano Zapata**, and Pascual Orozco, who had initially supported him, but wanted him to reform more rapidly than he was willing to. These leaders, with much of the rural population, rose up against Madero. From the right, the military plotted against him as well,

and General Victoriano Huerta staged a coup d'état in 1913. Within a week, Madero was murdered.

Huerta (whose government U.S. President Woodrow Wilson refused to recognize) was replaced in 1914 by Venustiano Carranza, who served off and on again as president until 1920. Although he tried to accommodate many of the radicals' demands, rebels such as Villa and Zapata continued to agitate against him. (Zapata, whose movement included many women, was killed in 1919. Villa, whose incursions into U.S. territory provoked an American military response in 1916, survived till 1923.) Carranza devised the populist Constitution of 1917, which embraced socialist principles, but had little chance to enforce it. Villa's and Zapata's rebellions sapped his strength, and his officers betrayed him. In 1920, Carranza, like Madero, was removed and killed by one of his generals, Álvaro Obregón.

In practical, if not ideological, terms, this moment is generally considered to have ended the revolution. Violence continued into the early 1930s, but order was restored, and the leaders—much like Napoleon or France's Directory—claimed to act in the revolution's name. In 1929, they created a **National Revolutionary Party** (renamed the PRI, or **Institutional Revolutionary Party**, in 1946). Between 1934 and 1940, Lázaro Cárdenas made the first genuine attempt to govern according to the Constitution of 1917, but the PRI regime gradually degenerated into mild authoritarianism.