

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA

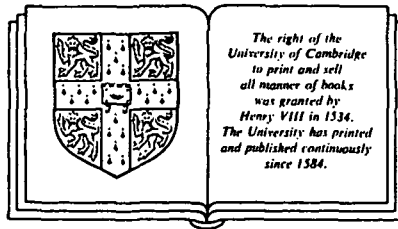
VOLUME III

From Independence to c. 1870

edited by

LESLIE BETHELL

*Reader in Hispanic American and
Brazilian History at University College London*



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THE ORIGINS OF SPANISH AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

Spain was a durable but not a developed metropolis. At the end of the eighteenth century, after three centuries of imperial rule, Spanish Americans still saw in their mother country an image of themselves. If the colonies exported primary products, so did Spain. If the colonies depended upon the merchant marine of foreigners, so did Spain. If the colonies were dominated by a seigneurial elite, disinclined to save and invest, so was Spain. The two economies differed in one activity: the colonies produced precious metals. And even this exceptional division of labour did not automatically benefit Spain. Here was a case rare in modern history – a colonial economy dependent upon an underdeveloped metropolis.

During the second half of the eighteenth century Bourbon Spain took stock of itself and sought to modernize its economy, society and institutions. Reformist ideology was eclectic in inspiration and pragmatic in intent. The starting point was Spain's own condition, especially the decline in productivity. Answers were sought in various schools of thought. The ideas of the physiocrats were invoked to establish the primacy of agriculture and the role of the state; mercantilism, to justify a more effective exploitation of colonial resources; economic liberalism, to support the removal of restrictions on trade and industry. The Enlightenment too exerted its influence, not so much in new political or philosophical ideas as in a preference for reason and experiment as opposed to authority and tradition. While these divergent trends may have been reconciled in the minds of intellectuals, they help to explain the inconsistencies in the formation of policy, as modernity struggled with tradition.

The principal aim was to reform existing structures rather than design new ones, and the basic economic objective was to improve agriculture

rather than to promote industry. The great population growth of the eighteenth century pressed relentlessly on land. The number of Spaniards increased by some 57 per cent, from 7.6 million at the beginning of the century to 12 million in 1808. Rising demand for agricultural products, both in Spain and on the international market, pushed up prices and the profits of landowners. At the same time the growth of the rural population caused a greater demand for land, and rents began to rise even higher than prices. Now more than ever it was vital to improve techniques, commercialize production, and remove obstacles to growth. The corn laws of 1765 abolished price ceilings on grain, permitted free trade within Spain and exports except during dearth. In 1788 landowners were given the right to enclose their lands and plough up grazing land. There was a limited distribution of royal, municipal and even church land. And the regulations of *comercio libre* from 1765 removed the worst restrictions on trade with Spanish America.

Economic improvement did not lead to great social change. There was a coincidence of interests between government reformers who wished to increase food supplies, landowners – mainly nobility and clergy – who wanted to maximize profit, and exporters who sought new markets. But an incipient middle sector was only faintly heard. Merchant groups were active in overseas trade, and new industrialists were at work in the provinces of the peninsula. Catalonia had developed a modern cotton and woollen industry which exported to America via Cádiz and was seeking more direct outlets. Merchants and manufacturers wanted to liberalize trade still further and to find in America markets which they could not secure in Spain. They anticipated *comercio libre* and profited from it.

Yet Spain missed the opportunity of fundamental change in the eighteenth century and finally abandoned the path of modernization. Castilians, it seemed, were unwilling to accumulate capital for investment in industry, even in the *fomento de industria popular*, the artisan industries so dear to some reformers, preferring instead to acquire additional land and luxury imports. Prospects of agrarian reform were frustrated by government apathy and the opposition of vested interests; agricultural incomes remained low and hindered the development of a national market for industry. The infrastructure too was badly outmoded. By the 1790s the transport system was unable to meet the demands upon it or to serve the needs of a growing population; transport became a major bottleneck which held back economic growth in the

Castilian heartland and prevented it from developing an industry of its own or becoming a market for the industry of other regions. Catalonia and the other maritime provinces reached their overseas markets and sources of raw materials by sea more easily than they reached Castile by land. Finally, except in the Catalan towns and a few ports of northern Spain, business organization was weak. In spite of state support the record of most commercial companies was unimpressive, suffering as they did from lack of capital and slowness of transactions, especially with America. So retarded was the commercial infrastructure that, although Spain produced a sufficiency of grain, the coastal regions often found it necessary to import supplies while export opportunities were also missed: 'at least 60,000 barrels of flour [are] needed by Cuba, which could and should be sent from Spain; our agriculture would profit to the extent of 20,000, 000 *reales* a year, which the North Americans thus take out of our colony'.¹

The second half of the eighteenth century, it is true, was a time of modest economic recovery in which Catalan industry and colonial trade played their part. But Spain remained essentially an agrarian economy, and overseas trade was valued above all as an outlet for agricultural production. In the final analysis the modernizing measures of Charles III (1759–88) were designed to revive a traditional sector of the economy, and it was made more apparent than ever that the Hispanic world was constructed not upon a division of labour between metropolis and colonies but upon ominous similarities. Old structures survived, and the reform movement itself collapsed amidst the panic induced by the French Revolution and the subsequent reaction under Charles IV (1788–1808). The success of absolute monarchy depended among other things on the character of the monarch. In the person of Charles IV the crown lost all credibility as an agent of reform. Statesmen gave way to courtiers, and the appointment of Manuel Godoy signalled a reversion to the style of the later Habsburgs; the new First Secretary was a classical *valido*, owing his position not to any qualifications but to royal favour alone. Godoy treated Spanish America as nothing more than a source of bullion and its people as taxpayers.

Meanwhile, if Spanish America could not find an industrial supplier and trading partner in Spain there was an alternative. The British economy during the eighteenth century was undergoing revolutionary

¹ *Correo Mercantil*, 25 October 1808, quoted in Gonzalo Anes, *Las crisis agrarias en la España moderna* (Madrid, 1970), 312.



Colonial Spanish America, c. 1800

change. And from 1780 to 1800 when the Industrial Revolution became really effective Britain experienced an unprecedented growth of trade, based mainly upon factory production in textiles. It was now that the Lancashire cotton industry underwent great expansion, while iron and steel production also showed an impressive rate of increase. France, the first country to follow Britain's lead, still lagged behind in productivity, and the gap widened during war and blockade after 1789. At this point Britain was virtually without a rival. A substantial proportion – possibly as much as a third – of Britain's total industrial output was exported overseas. About 1805 the cotton industry exported 66 per cent of its final product, the woollen industry 35 per cent, the iron and steel industry 23.6 per cent. And in the course of the eighteenth century British trade had come to rely increasingly on colonial markets. Whereas at the beginning of the eighteenth century 78 per cent of British exports went to the continent of Europe, at the end the protected markets of Britain's European rivals absorbed only 30 per cent, while North America took 30 per cent and 40 per cent went to 'all parts of the world', which meant in effect the British empire, especially the West Indies (25 per cent), and also included the American colonies of Spain. Virtually the only limit on the expansion of British exports to the colonial markets was the purchasing power of their customers, and this depended on what they could earn from exports to Britain. Although Spanish America had only a limited range of commodity exports capable of earning returns in Britain, it had one vital medium of trade, silver. Britain therefore valued her trade with Spanish America and sought to expand it, either through the re-export trade from Spain, or by the channels of contraband in the West Indies and the South Atlantic.

These considerations, of course, did not amount to a policy of British imperialism in Spanish America or an intent to oust Spain by force, either for conquest or for liberation. In spite of the urgings of Spanish American exiles and the promptings of interested merchants, Britain remained aloof. The commercial argument for intervention in Spanish America was rarely regarded as compelling enough to justify fighting for new markets. Until the crisis years of 1806–7, when it appeared that the continent of Europe was being closed to British exports, existing outlets were regarded as adequate. The Spanish American market, though useful in its existing proportions and important enough to be expanded where possible, was never so vital that it was necessary to incorporate it into the British empire. Nevertheless, the market had proved vulnerable

to British penetration and the consumers were willing. During times of war with Spain, especially after 1796 when the British navy blockaded Cádiz, British exports supplied the consequent shortages in the Spanish colonies. The invidious contrast between Britain and Spain, between growth and stagnation, between strength and weakness, had a powerful effect in the minds of Spanish Americans. And there was a further psychological refinement. If a world power like Britain could lose the greater part of its American empire, by what right did Spain remain?

The Spanish empire in America rested upon a balance of power groups – the administration, the Church, and the local elite. The administration possessed political though little military power, and derived its authority from the sovereignty of the crown and its own bureaucratic function. Secular sovereignty was reinforced by the Church, whose religious mission was backed by jurisdictional and economic power. But the greatest economic power lay with the elites, property owners in town and country, comprising a minority of *peninsulares* and a greater proportion of creoles (whites born in the colonies). By the eighteenth century local oligarchies were well established through America, based on vested interests in land, mining and commerce, on enduring ties of kinship and alliance with the colonial bureaucracy, with the viceregal entourage and the judges of the *audiencia*, and on a strong sense of regional identity. The weakness of royal government and its need for revenue enabled these groups to develop effective forms of resistance to the distant imperial government. Offices were bought, informal bargains were made. The traditional bureaucracy reflected these conditions, bending to pressure and avoiding conflict, constituting in effect not the agents of imperial centralization but brokers between Spanish crown and American subjects, instruments of bureaucratic devolution rather than a unitary state. The Bourbons found this unacceptable.

Bourbon policy altered relations between the major power groups. The administration itself was the first to disturb the balance. Enlightened absolutism enlarged the function of the state at the expense of the private sector and ultimately alienated the local ruling class. The Bourbons overhauled imperial government, centralized the mechanism of control and modernized the bureaucracy. New viceroalties and other units of administration were created. New officials, the intendants, were appointed. New methods of government were tried. These were partly administrative and fiscal devices; they also implied closer supervision of

the American population. What the metropolis thought was rational development, the local elites interpreted as an attack on local interests. For the intendants replaced *alcaldes mayores* and *corregidores*, officials who had long had been adept at reconciling different interests. They derived their income not from a salary but from entrepreneurship, trading with the Indians under their jurisdiction, advancing capital and credit, supplying equipment and goods, and exercising an economic monopoly in their district. Their financial backers, merchant speculators in the colonies, guaranteed a salary and expenses to ingoing officials, who then forced the Indians to accept advances of cash and equipment in order to produce an export crop or simply to consume surplus commodities. This was the notorious *repartimiento de comercio*, and by it the different interest groups were satisfied. The Indians were forced into producing and consuming; royal officials received an income; merchants gained an export crop; and the crown saved money on salaries. The price, of course, was high in other respects, amounting to abdication of imperial control in face of local pressures. The practice was extensive in Mexico; and in Peru it helped to cause the Indian rebellion of 1780.

Spanish reformers decreed the abolition of the entire system in the interests of rational and humane administration. The Ordinance of Intendants (1784 in Peru, 1786 in Mexico), a basic instrument of Bourbon reform, ended *repartimientos* and replaced *corregidores* and *alcaldes mayores* by intendants, assisted by subdelegates in the *pueblos de indios*. The new legislation introduced paid officials; and it guaranteed the Indians the right to trade and work as they wished.

Enlightened administrative reform did not necessarily work in America. Colonial interests, peninsular and creole alike, found the new policy inhibiting and they resented the unwonted intervention of the metropolis. The abolition of *repartimientos* threatened not only merchants and landowners but also the Indians themselves, unaccustomed to using money in a free market and dependent on credit for livestock and merchandise. How could Indians now be incorporated into the economy? Private capitalists hesitated to step into the place of the old officials and advance credit, fearing it was illegal. So there was confusion, and production and trade were damaged. Some hoped for the suppression of the intendants and the restoration of the *repartimientos*. Others took the law into their own hands. In Mexico and Peru the *repartimientos* reappeared, as the subdelegates sought to increase their income, the landowners to retain their grip on labour and the merchants to re-

establish old consumer markets. After a brief flurry, therefore, Bourbon policy was sabotaged within the colonies themselves; local elites responded unfavourably to the new absolutism and they would soon have to decide whether to reach for political power in order to prevent further instalments of enlightened legislation.

As the Bourbons strengthened the administration, so they weakened the Church. In 1767 they expelled the Jesuits from America, some 2,500 in all, the majority of them Americans, who were thus removed from their homelands as well as their missions. The expulsion was an attack on the semi-independence of the Jesuits and an assertion of imperial control. For the Jesuits possessed a great franchise in America, and in Paraguay they had a fortified enclave; their ownership of haciendas and other forms of property gave them independent economic power which was enhanced by their successful entrepreneurial activities. In the long term Spanish Americans were ambivalent towards the expulsion. The Jesuit property expropriated in 1767, the extensive lands and rich haciendas, were sold to the wealthiest groups in the colonies, the creole families who were credit-worthy enough to bid for them. More immediately, however, Spanish Americans regarded the expulsion as an act of despotism, a direct attack upon their compatriots in their own countries. Of the 680 Jesuits expelled from Mexico about 450 were Mexicans. Of the 360 or so expelled from Chile some 58 per cent were Chileans, 25 per cent Spaniards and the rest from other parts of Europe and America. Their life-long exile was a cause of great resentment not only among themselves but also among the families and sympathisers whom they left behind.

'All privileges are odious', said the Count of Campomanes. An essential theme of Bourbon policy was opposition to corporate bodies possessing a special franchise in the state. The embodiment of privilege was the Church, whose *fueros* gave it clerical immunity from civil jurisdiction and whose wealth made it the largest source of investment capital in Spanish America. The power of the Church, though not its doctrine, was one of the principal targets of the Bourbon reformers. They sought to bring the clergy under the jurisdiction of the secular courts and in the process they increasingly curtailed clerical immunity. Then, with the defences of the Church weakened, they hoped to lay hands on its property. The clergy reacted vigorously. While they did not challenge Bourbon regalism, they bitterly resented the infringement of their personal privilege. They resisted Bourbon policy and were

supported in many cases by pious laymen. The lower clergy, whose *fuero* was virtually their only material asset, were the more seriously alienated, and from their ranks, particularly in Mexico, many of the insurgent officers and guerrilla leaders would be recruited.

Another focus of power and privilege was the army. Spain had not the resources to maintain large garrisons of regular troops in America, and she relied chiefly on colonial militias, strengthened by a few peninsular units. From 1760 a new militia was created and the burden of defence was placed squarely on colonial economies and personnel. But Bourbon reforms were often ambiguous in their effects. To encourage recruits, militia members were admitted to the *fuero militar*, a status which gave to creoles, and to some extent even to mixed races, the privileges and immunities already enjoyed by the Spanish military, in particular the protection of military law, to the detriment of civil jurisdiction. Moreover, as imperial defence was increasingly committed to the colonial militia, officered in many cases by creoles, Spain designed a weapon which might ultimately be turned against her. Even before this point was reached the militia created problems of internal security.

In Peru, when the Indian rebellion of 1780 broke out, the local militia first stood by and watched, and then suffered severe defeat. As its efficiency and its loyalty were both called into question, the authorities decided that it was too great a risk to employ a militia force consisting of *mestizo* (mixed Indian-Spanish) troops and creole officers, many of whom had their own grievances against Bourbon policy, in a counter-insurgency role among Indians and mixed races. To crush the revolt they sent in regular army units from the coast officered by peninsular Spaniards and composed largely of blacks and mulattos (mixed black-European), with loyal Indian conscripts in support. In the wake of the rebellion Spain took a number of steps to strengthen imperial control. The role of the militia was reduced and responsibility for defence was restored to the regular army. Senior officers in both regular and militia units were now invariably Spaniards. And the *fuero militar* was restricted, especially among non-whites. Thus the militia was prevented from becoming an independent corporation, and the creoles were halted in their progress along the ladder of military promotion. This was a source of grievance, but one which remained muted in the peculiar social structure of Peru. Fear of the Indian and *mestizo* masses was a powerful stimulus to loyalty among creoles and a potent reason for accepting white rule, even if the whites were *peninsulares*.

In Mexico, as in Peru, there were few signs of creole militarism. A military career was not in itself attractive, nor was it made so by the authorities. In fact the militia had its critics. Viceroy Revillagigedo thought it folly to give weapons to Indians, blacks and *castas* (people of mixed race), and he doubted the loyalty of creole officers. Even after 1789, when the militia was in fact expanded, the creoles usually joined for non-military reasons, for offices and titles, and to add prestige to a fortune made in mining or trade. As for the *fuero militar*, no doubt it was useful, but against it had to be weighed the hardships of military service. The lower classes obtained little from army service, though a few saw it as a way to escape the degradation of their caste. This however only reinforced the fears held by creole officers, and by all whites, that the army might be turned against them. If the creoles feared the Indians, the *peninsulares* distrusted the creoles, and for this reason it was rare for a creole to obtain a senior commission, even after 1789 when Spain could spare few regulars from Europe. The lesson which Mexicans learnt was that access to military promotion, as well as to civil office, was increasingly restricted, and that official hostility to corporate privilege appeared to coincide with a reaction against creole influence in government.

While the Bourbons curtailed privilege in Spanish America, so they exerted closer economic control, forcing the local economies to work directly for Spain and diverting to the metropolis the surplus of production and revenue which had long been retained within the colonies. From the 1750s great efforts were made to increase imperial revenue. Two devices were particularly favoured. Royal monopolies were imposed on an increasing number of commodities, including tobacco, spirits, gunpowder, salt and other consumer goods. And the government assumed the direct administration of taxes traditionally farmed out to private contractors. The dreaded *alcabala*, or sales tax, continued to burden all transactions, and now its level was raised in some cases from 4 to 6 per cent, while its collection was more rigorously enforced. The new revenue was not normally expended within America itself on public works and services. It was converted instantly into specie and shipped to Spain, depriving the local economies of vital money supply. In Mexico royal income rose from 3 million pesos in 1712 to 14 million a year by the end of the century. Six million of this went as pure profit to the treasury in Madrid. In good years colonial revenue might represent 20 per cent of Spanish treasury income. This dwindled almost to zero during times of

war with Britain, especially in the years 1797–1802 and 1805–8, though even then the crown still received an American revenue indirectly by selling bills of exchange and licences for neutrals – and sometimes for the enemy – to trade with the colonies.

Americans were not consulted about Spanish foreign policy, though they had to pay for it in the form of tax increases and wartime shortages. In addition to the complaints of all consumers, particular economic interests had particular grievances. The mining sectors in Mexico and Peru paid substantial sums in the royal fifth, war taxes on silver, duties on refining and coining, fees on state-controlled supplies of mercury and gunpowder, not to mention war loans and other extraordinary contributions. And from 1796, when war with Britain impeded the supply of mercury from Spain, miners suffered heavy losses. Conditions inherent in Spanish rule, therefore, were seen as obstacles to productivity and profit. Yet Spain valued mining and favoured its interests. From 1776 the state played its part in reducing production costs, halving the price of mercury and gunpowder, exempting mining equipment and raw materials from *alcabalas*, extending credit facilities, and in general improving the infrastructure of the industry. Other sectors were not so privileged. Agricultural interests had various grievances. Ranchers deplored the many taxes on marketing animals and the *alcabalas* on all animal sales and purchases; sugar and spirits producers complained of high duties; and consumers, *peninsulares*, creoles and castes alike, complained about taxes on goods in daily use. Although tax burdens did not necessarily make revolutionaries out of their victims or cause them to demand independence, yet they engendered a climate of resentment and a desire for some degree of local autonomy.

From about 1765 resistance to imperial taxation was constant and sometimes violent. And as, from 1779 and the war with Britain (1779–83), Spain began to turn the screw more tightly, so opposition became more defiant. In Peru in 1780 creole riots were overtaken by Indian rebellion; and in New Granada in 1781 creoles and *mestizos* surprised the authorities by the violence of their protest.² From 1796 and a renewed war in Europe tax demands were relentless, and from 1804 they increased still further. Donations were demanded from wealthy families, in Mexico for amounts between 50,000 and 300,000 pesos, in Peru for lesser sums. Grants were made from the military pension funds, from other public

² See below, 32–4.

funds, from the *consulados* (merchant guilds) and the *cabildos* (municipal councils). No doubt some of these donations were expressions of patriotism on the part of wealthy *peninsulares* and officials, but others were forced and resented. The greatest grievance was caused by the *consolidación* decree of 26 December 1804 which ordered the sequestration of charitable funds in America and their remission to Spain.

As applied in Mexico, the decree attacked Church property where it most hurt. The Church had great capital resources. In particular the chantries and pious foundations possessed large financial reserves, accumulated over the centuries from bequests of the faithful. In putting this capital to work the churches and convents of Mexico acted as informal financial institutions, advancing money to merchants and property owners, indeed anyone wishing to raise a mortgage-type loan to cover purchase of property or other expenditure, the interest rate being 5 per cent a year. Capital rather than property was the principal wealth of the Mexican Church, and church capital was the main motor of the Mexican economy. By this law chantries and pious funds were very much depleted, and this affected not only the Church but the economic interests of the many people who relied on church funds for capital and credit. These included noble *hacendados* and small farmers, urban property owners and rural proprietors, miners and merchants, a variety of social types, Spaniards as well as creoles. Perhaps the greatest hardship was suffered by a large number of medium and small proprietors, who could not assemble capital quickly enough and were forced to sell their property on highly unfavourable terms. Many substantial landowners had difficulty in repaying; a few had their estates seized and auctioned. The clergy were embittered, especially the lower clergy who often lived on the interest of the capital loaned. Bishop Manuel Abad y Queipo, who estimated the total value of church capital invested in the Mexican economy at 44.5 million pesos, or two-thirds of all capital invested, warned the government that resistance would be strong. He went in person to Madrid to request the government to think again; Manuel Godoy, Charles IV's chief minister, gave him no satisfaction, but in due course, following Napoleon's invasion of the peninsula, the hated decree was suspended, first on the initiative of the viceroy (August 1808) and then formally by the supreme junta in Seville (4 January 1809). Meanwhile some 10 million pesos had been sent to Spain, and the officials who collected it, including the viceroy, shared 500,000 pesos in commission. The sequestration of church wealth epitomized Spanish colonial policy

in the last decade of empire. If the effects stopped short of catastrophe and rebellion, they were nonetheless ominous for Spain. This careless and ignorant measure alerted the Church, outraged property owners and caused a great crisis of confidence. It was a supreme example of bad government, exposing corruption among Spanish officials in Mexico and misuse of Mexican money in Spain. In enforcing the policy the authorities broke peninsular unity in Mexico and turned many Spaniards against the administration. And to Mexicans this was the ultimate proof of their dependence, as they saw Mexican capital taken out of the Mexican economy and diverted to Spain, to serve a foreign policy in which they had no say and no interest.

The sequestration joined rich and poor, Spaniard and creole, in opposition to imperial interference and support for a greater control over their own affairs. Moreover, it came at a time when increased tax demands could no longer be justified as a measure of increased productivity or expanding trade.

The Bourbon planners sought to apply increased fiscal pressure to an expanding and a controlled economy. And first they undertook the reorganization of colonial trade to rescue it from foreign hands and guarantee exclusive returns to Spain. Spanish exports, carried in national shipping, to an imperial market, this was their ideal. Between 1765 and 1776 they dismantled the old framework of transatlantic trade and abandoned ancient rules and restrictions. They lowered tariffs, abolished the monopoly of Cádiz and Seville, opened free communications between the ports of the peninsula and the Caribbean and its mainland, and authorized inter-colonial trade. And in 1778 *un comercio libre y protegido* between Spain and America was extended to include Buenos Aires, Chile and Peru, in 1789 Venezuela and Mexico. In the literature of the time it was made abundantly clear that the purpose of *comercio libre* was the development of Spain, not America; and it was intended to bind the colonial economy more closely to the metropolis. Gaspar de Jovellanos, one of the more liberal Spanish economists, extolled the decree of 1778 because it gave greater opportunities to Spanish agriculture and industry in a market which justified its existence by consuming Spanish products: 'Colonies are useful in so far as they offer a secure market for the surplus production of the metropolis'.³

³ 'Dictamen sobre embarque de paños extranjeros para nuestras colonias', *Obras de Jovellanos* (Madrid, 1952), II, 71.

A colonial compact of this kind demanded that some 80 per cent of the value of imports from America should consist of precious metals, the rest marketable raw materials, and that no processing industry should be permitted in the colonies except sugar mills. According to these criteria, *comercio libre* was a success. Decrees in themselves, of course, could not create economic growth. To some extent *comercio libre* simply followed and gave legal expression to prevailing trends in the Atlantic economy. But whatever the degree of causation, there is no doubt that Spanish agriculture and industry underwent some revival in this period, which was reflected in an expansion of overseas trade. Shipping alone increased by 86 per cent, from 1,272 vessels in 1710–47 to 2,365 in 1748–78. The imports of gold and silver, public and private, rose from 152 million pesos in 1717–38 to 439 million in 1747–78, an increase of 188 per cent; and precious metals came to constitute at least 76 per cent of total imports from the colonies. Cádiz itself, with the advantage of more outlets in America, continued to dominate the trade. It is true that Catalan exports to America, which had helped to prepare the way for *comercio libre*, benefited still more from its application, and the colonial trade of Barcelona experienced further growth, not least in manufactures. But Cádiz was still the first port of Spain; its exports to America moved strongly ahead, and in the period 1778–96 they amounted to 76 per cent of all Spanish exports to America, Barcelona coming second with some 10 per cent. This was the golden age of the Cádiz trade and a time of new growth for Spain. The average annual value of exports from Spain to Spanish America in the years 1782–96 was 400 per cent higher than in 1778.

Even in these years, however, there were ominous signs. Most of the Spanish exports to America were agricultural goods, olive oil, wine and brandy, flour, dried fruits. Even Barcelona, the industrial centre of Spain, exported up to 40 per cent of its total in agricultural products, mainly wines and spirits, while its industrial exports were almost exclusively textiles; all of these commodities were already produced in America itself and could have been further developed there. Spain's export competed with, rather than complemented, American products, and *comercio libre* did nothing to synchronize the two economies. On the contrary, it was designed to stimulate the dominant sector of the Spanish economy, agriculture. The industrial gap left by Spain was filled by foreigners, who still dominated the transatlantic trade. While there is evidence that after mid-century, 1757–76, the proportion of industrial

exports (71.84 per cent) over agricultural (28.16 per cent) increased compared with the period 1720–51 (54.43 and 45.57 per cent respectively), a substantial part of the increase could be attributed to foreign products. Much of the Cádiz trade to America was a re-export trade in foreign goods. In 1778 foreign products amounted to 62 per cent of registered exports to America, and they were also ahead in 1784, 1785 and 1787. Thereafter the share of national goods (still predominantly agricultural) was the greater in every year except 1791, and by 1794 the ratio had been reversed. But this improvement in Spain's performance was countered by contraband and by foreign penetration in America itself, while about 75 per cent of total shipping in the colonial trade was of foreign origin.

Spain remained a quasi-metropolis, hardly more developed than its colonies. But what did *comercio libre* do for Spanish America? No doubt it gave some stimulus to a few sectors of colonial production. The natural trade routes of America were opened up, and Spanish American exports to Spain rose substantially after 1782. The exports of hides from Buenos Aires, cacao and other products from Venezuela, sugar from Cuba, all measurably increased. In Mexico a new commercial class was born, and immigrants from Spain began to compete with the old monopolists. In spite of the opposition of traditional interests in Mexico City, new *consulados* were established in Veracruz and Guadalajara (1795). Pressure for growth and development became more urgent: *consulado* reports drew attention to the country's untapped resources and clamoured for more trade, increased local production, greater choice and lower prices. These were not demands for independence, but the *consulados* expressed a common frustration over the obstacles to development and dissatisfaction with the Spanish trade monopoly. As the secretary of the *consulado* of Veracruz wrote in 1817, 'among the motives, real or imagined, invoked by the rebels for lighting the fire of insurrection, one has been the grievance against the scarcity and costliness of goods, national and foreign, supplied by the merchants of the peninsula'.⁴ Indeed *comercio libre* left the monopoly legally intact. The colonies were still debarred from direct access to international markets, except by the uncertain ways of contraband trade. They still suffered from discriminatory duties or even outright prohibitions in favour of Spanish goods. The new impulse to Spanish trade soon saturated these limited markets, and the problem

⁴ Javier Ortiz de la Tabla Ducasse, *Comercio exterior de Veracruz 1778–1821. Crisis de dependencia* (Seville, 1978), 113.

of the colonies was to earn enough to pay for growing import Bankruptcies were frequent, local industry declined, even agricultural products like wine and brandy were subject to competition from in ports, and precious metals flowed out in this unequal struggle.

The metropolis had not the means or the interest to supply the various factors of production needed for development, to invest in growth, to co-ordinate the imperial economy. This was true not only of a neglected colony like New Granada but even of a mining economy like Peru, where agriculture was depressed for lack of manpower, capital and transport where consumers depended for grain on Chile, and where only its mineral resources saved it from complete stagnation. Moreover, the metropolis was concerned primarily with its own trade to the colonies and did not consistently promote inter-colonial trade. The Spanish empire remained a disjointed economy, in which the metropolis dealt with a series of separate parts often at the expense of the whole. The Hispanic world was characterized by rivalry not integration, of Chile against Peru, Guayaquil against Callao, Lima against the Río de la Plata, Montevideo against Buenos Aires, anticipating as colonies the divisions of future nations.

The role of America remained the same, to consume Spanish exports, and to produce minerals and a few tropical products. In these terms *comercio libre* was bound to increase dependency, reverting to a primitive idea of colonies and a crude division of labour after a long period during which inertia and neglect had allowed a measure of more autonomous growth. Now the influx of manufactured goods damaged local industries, which were often unable to compete with cheaper and better quality imports. The textile industries of Puebla and Querétaro, the *obrajes* of Cuzco and Tucumán, all were hit by crippling competition from Europe. Exports from Guayaquil, a traditional source of textiles for many parts of the Americas, declined from 440 bales in 1768 to 157 in 1788. From this time the textile industry of Quito remained in depression, displaced in Peruvian and other markets by cheaper imports from Europe. The decline of Quito's textiles was reported with satisfaction by Archbishop Antonio Caballero y Góngora, viceroy of New Granada (1782–9), when he observed that agriculture and mining were 'the appropriate function of colonies', while industry simply provided 'manufactures which ought to be imported from the metropolis'.⁵ The

⁵ 'Relación del estado del Nuevo Reino de Granada' (1789), José Manuel Pérez Ayala, *Antonio Caballero y Góngora, virrey y arzobispo de Santa Fe 1723–1796* (Bogotá, 1951), 360–1.

fact that Spain could not itself produce all the manufactures needed in its dependencies did not, in the minds of Spanish rulers, invalidate their policy. There was, after all, a small industrial sector in Spain, jealous of its interests; to supplement this, Spanish merchants could still make profits from re-exporting the goods of foreign suppliers; and to maintain dependency was regarded as more important than to mitigate its consequences. It was an axiom among Spanish statesmen and officials that economic dependence was a precondition of political subordination, and that growth of manufactures in the colonies would lead to self-sufficiency and autonomy. In deference to imperial definitions, colonial officials often turned their eyes from reality. Antonio de Narváez y la Torre, governor of Santa Marta, reported in 1778 that he had debated whether to establish factories for the manufacture of cotton, as there were abundant local supplies of best quality raw material, but he had decided against it, in the interests of the system by which 'America provides Spain with the raw materials which this vast and fertile country produces, and Spain redistributes them as manufactures made by her artisans and industries; thus everyone is employed according to the character of both countries, and the relations, ties, and mutual dependence of each part of the empire are maintained'.⁶ Spanish manufacturers were constantly on the watch for any infringement of this formula. Catalonia in particular, lacking an outlet in the stagnant and isolated Spanish interior, needed the American market, which was an important consumer of its textiles and other goods and a supplier of raw cotton. The textile workshops of Mexico and Puebla were productive enough to alert the Barcelona manufacturers; they frequently complained of the effect of local competition on their exports and sought from the crown 'the strictest orders for the immediate destruction of the textile factories established in those colonies'.⁷

This was a direct conflict of interests, and the response of the imperial government was predictable. A royal decree of 28 November 1800 prohibiting the establishment of manufactures in the colonies was followed by another of 30 October 1801 'concerning the excessive establishment there of factories and machinery in opposition to those which flourish in Spain and which are intended to supply primarily our Americas'. The government explained that it could not allow the extension of industrial establishments even during wartime, for these

⁶ Sergio Elias Ortiz (ed.), *Escritos de dos economistas coloniales* (Bogotá, 1965), 25–6.

⁷ Antonio García-Baquero, *Comercio colonial y guerras revolucionarias* (Seville, 1972), 83.

diverted labour from the essential tasks of mining gold and silver and producing colonial commodities. Officials were instructed to ascertain the number of factories in their districts and 'to effect their destruction by the most convenient means they can devise, even if it means taking them over by the royal treasury on the pretext of making them productive'.⁸ But times were changing, and from 1796–1802, when war with Britain isolated the colonies from the metropolis, local textile manufacturers managed to begin or to renew operations, and from 1804 war gave further opportunities. Juan López Cancelada claimed in Cadiz in 1811 that 'each of the wars which we have had with the English nation has been a cause of increase in the manufactures of New Spain', and he instanced the case of the textile factories of the Catalan Francisco Iglesias in Mexico, which employed more than 2,000 workers.⁹ Spanish manufacturers opposed these developments to the bitter end.

The colonies served Spain as mines, plantations and ranches, now as never before, but even in these appropriate functions relations with the metropolis were subject to increasing strain. In the course of the eighteenth century Mexican silver production rose continuously from 5 million pesos in 1702, to 18 million pesos in the boom of the 1770s, and a peak of 27 million in 1804. By this time Mexico accounted for 67 per cent of all silver produced in America, a position which had been brought about by a conjunction of circumstances – rich bonanzas, improved technology, consolidation of mines under larger ownership, lowering of production costs by tax concessions. Then, from the 1780s, the industry received large injections of merchant capital, a by-product of *comercio libre* itself. New merchants entered the field with less capital but more enterprise. As competition lowered profits, the old monopolists began to withdraw their capital from transatlantic trade and to seek more profitable investments, including mining, with results advantageous to the economy and to themselves. Mexico was exceptionally successful. In Upper Peru all was not well with silver mining, but Potosí survived and continued to produce some surplus for Spain. Lower Peru increased its silver output in the late eighteenth century, a modest boom compared with that of Mexico but vital for the colony's overseas trade. Registered silver rose from 246,000 marks in 1777 to a peak of 637,000 marks in 1799 (a mark was worth 8 pesos 4 reales), maintaining a high level until 1812; during this period improved draining techniques, diversion of capital

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁹ Ortiz de la Tabla Ducasse, *Comercio exterior de Veracruz*, 336–9.

from Potosí, a supply of free labour and the support of the mining tribunal, all contributed to higher output.

The late colonial mining cycle, significant though it was for the local economies, did not entirely serve imperial interests. First, the metropolis was placed under more urgent pressure by the colonies to maintain vital supplies of mercury and equipment, which it was patently incapable of doing during wartime, with the result that Spain itself was seen as an obstacle to growth. Secondly, in one of the great ironies of Spanish colonial history, the climax of the great silver age coincided with the destruction of Spain's maritime power and thus of her colonial trade. From 1796 Spain and her merchants had to watch helplessly as the fruits of empire were diverted into the hands of others, as the returns from the mining boom were placed at risk from foreign marauders or reduced by the trade of foreign merchants.

In agriculture, as in mining, it was impossible to reconcile the interests of Spain and those of America. Creole landowners sought greater export outlets than Spain would allow. In Venezuela the great proprietors, producers of cacao, indigo, tobacco, coffee, cotton and hides, were permanently frustrated by Spanish control of the import-export trade. Even after *comercio libre* the new breed of merchants, whether they were Spaniards or Spanish-orientated Venezuelans, exerted a monopoly stranglehold on the Venezuelan economy, underpaying for exports and overcharging for imports. Creole landowners and consumers demanded more trade with foreigners, denounced Spanish merchants as 'oppressors', attacked the idea that commerce existed 'solely for the benefit of the metropolis', and agitated against what they called in 1797 'the spirit of monopoly under which this province groans'.¹⁰ In the Río de la Plata, too, *comercio libre* brought more Spanish merchants to control the trade of Buenos Aires, sometimes in collusion with local agents. But in the 1790s these were challenged by independent *porteño* merchants who exported hides, employed their own capital and shipping and offered better prices to the *estancieros*. These interests wanted freedom to trade directly with all countries and to export the products of the country without restriction. In 1809 they pressed for the opening of the port to British trade, which the Spaniards, Catalans and other peninsular interests strongly opposed. Here, too, there was an irreconcilable conflict of interests. But even within the colony economic interests were not

¹⁰ E. Arcila Farias, *Economía colonial de Venezuela* (Mexico, 1946), 368–9.

homogeneous or united in a vision of independence; and growing regionalism, with one province demanding protection for local products and another wanting freedom of trade, created its own divisions. Yet the conviction grew stronger that, whatever the answer to these problems, they could only be resolved by autonomous decisions.

The imperial role of Spain and the dependence of America were put to their final test during the long war with Britain from 1796. In April 1797, following victory over the Spanish fleet at Cape St Vincent, Admiral Nelson stationed a British squadron outside the port of Cádiz and imposed a total blockade. At the same time the Royal Navy blockaded Spanish American ports and attacked Spanish shipping at sea. The results were dramatic. The trade from Cádiz to America, already in recession from 1793, was now completely paralysed. Imports into Veracruz from Spain dropped from 6,549,000 pesos in 1796 to 520,000 pesos in 1797; exports from 7,304,000 pesos to 238,000; and the prices of many European goods rose by 100 per cent. All over the Americas *consulados* reported extreme shortage of consumer goods and vital supplies. And while American interests pressed for access to foreign suppliers, so the Cádiz merchants insisted on clinging to the monopoly. As Spain considered the dilemma, its hand was forced. Havana simply opened its port to North American and other neutral shipping. Spain was obliged therefore to allow the same for all Spanish America or risk losing control – and revenue. As an emergency measure a decree was issued (18 November 1797) allowing a legal and heavily taxed trade with Spanish America in neutral vessels or, as the decree stated, ‘in national or foreign vessels from the ports of the neutral powers or from those of Spain, with obligation to return to the latter’.¹¹ The object was to make neutrals the medium of trade with the Spanish colonies, the better to avoid the British blockade and to supply the lack of Spanish shipping. They became in effect virtually the only carriers, the one life-line linking the Spanish colonies to markets and supplies. The results were as revealing as the previous stoppage. Under neutral trade imports into Veracruz rose from 1,799,000 pesos in 1798 to 5,510,400 in 1799, exports from 2,230,400 to 6,311,500.

These wartime concessions were reluctantly given and quickly revoked. The Spanish government feared that its control was slipping away in favour of the trade and industry of the enemy, for during this

¹¹ Sergio Villalobos R., *El comercio y la crisis colonial* (Santiago, 1968), 115.

time colonial trade was almost entirely in the hands of foreigners, including indirectly the British, whose goods were introduced by neutrals. Spain was thus left with the burdens of empire without any of its benefits. Naturally, the merchants of Cádiz and Barcelona objected, and in spite of colonial protests the permit was revoked on 20 April 1799. Yet the outcome was still more damaging to Spain, for the revocation was ignored. Colonies such as Cuba, Venezuela and Guatemala continued to trade with neutrals, and North American shipping continued to trade into Veracruz, Cartagena and Buenos Aires. Spanish vessels simply could not make the crossing between Cádiz and America, such was the dominance of British sea power: of the 22 ships which left Cádiz in the twelve months after the order of April 1799 only 3 reached their destination. So it was the neutrals who saved the colonial trade and the neutrals who profited. This commerce also benefited the colonies, providing improved sources of imports and renewed demand for exports. The Spanish government repeated the prohibition of neutral trade by decree of 18 July 1800, but by now Spanish America was accustomed to dealing directly with its customers and suppliers, and the trade with foreigners was irresistible. As the war continued Spain had to accept the facts. In the course of 1801 special permission was given to Cuba and Venezuela to trade with neutrals. And to retain a place for itself Spain was reduced to selling licences to various European and North American companies, and to individual Spaniards, to trade with Veracruz, Havana, Venezuela and the Río de la Plata; many of their cargoes were British manufactures, sailing with British as well as Spanish licences, making returns in gold, silver or colonial produce to Spain, or neutral ports, or even to England.

The Spanish trade monopoly came to an effective end in the period 1797–1801, and the economic independence of the colonies was brought considerably closer. In 1801 Cádiz colonial exports were down 49 per cent on 1799 and imports 63.24 per cent. Meanwhile the trade of the United States with the Spanish colonies was booming, exports rising from 1,389,219 dollars in 1795 to 8,437,659 in 1801, and imports from 1,739,138 dollars to 12,799,888. The peace of Amiens in 1802, it is true, enabled Spain to renew her communications with the colonies, and merchants sought out the ports and markets of America once more. There was a surge of trade, and in the years 1802–4 Cádiz recovered, though 54 per cent of its exports to America were foreign goods. But it was impossible to restore the old monopoly: the colonies had now

established active trading links with foreigners, especially with the United States, and realised the obvious advantages which they had so long been denied. The renewal of the war with Britain merely confirmed this.

The last remnants of Spanish sea power were now swept aside. On 5 October 1804, anticipating formal war with Spain, British frigates intercepted a large bullion shipment from the Río de la Plata, sank one Spanish vessel and captured three others carrying about 4.7 million pesos. In the following year at Trafalgar catastrophe was complete; without an Atlantic fleet Spain was isolated from the Americas. Imports of colonial products and precious metals slumped, and in 1805 Cádiz exports went down by 85 per cent on those of 1804. The fabric of Spain's world began to fall apart. Once more the colonies began to protest, their exports blocked and devalued, their imports scarce and expensive. Once more other powers moved in to supplant Spain. The demise of Spain's American trade coincided with a desperate British thrust to compensate for the closure of European markets by Napoleon's continental system. So there was a new urgency to British contraband trade, which earned profits and the sinews of war simultaneously, demonstrating to the colonies, as a Spanish official noted, how 'the English take out of our possessions the money which gives them the power to destroy us'.¹² There was only one way for Spain to counter contraband and that was to admit a neutral trade; in 1805 such a trade was authorized once more, this time without the obligation of returning to Spain. The metropolis was now virtually eliminated from the Atlantic. From 1805 neutral shipping dominated the trade of Veracruz, contributing 60.53 per cent of total imports in 1807 and 95.11 per cent of exports (over 80 per cent silver). In 1806 not a single vessel from Spain entered Havana, and the Cuban trade was conducted by neutrals, foreign colonies and Spanish colonies. In 1807 the metropolis received not one shipment of bullion.

The effect of the wars on Spain was that of a national disaster. A whole range of her agricultural products, together with manufactured goods, were deprived of a vital market, and while this caused recession in the agricultural sector, about one third of the textile industry closed down. Industry and consumers alike felt the shortage of colonial primary products, while the non-arrival of precious metals hit the state as well as merchants. The crown had to seek new sources of income: from 1799 it

¹² Antonio de Narváez, Cartagena, 30 June 1805, Ortiz, *Escritos de dos economistas coloniales*, 112.

tried to impose economies on the administration and demanded an annual contribution of 300 million reales; new issues of state bonds were launched, higher import taxes demanded, and finally the fatal *consolidación* was decreed. The future of Spain as an imperial power was now seriously in doubt. The economic monopoly was lost beyond recovery. All that remained was political control, and this too was under increasing strain.

On 27 June 1806 a British expeditionary force from the Cape of Good Hope occupied Buenos Aires. The invaders rightly calculated that they had little to fear from the Spanish viceroy and his forces, but they underestimated the will and ability of the people of Buenos Aires to defend themselves. A local army, augmented by volunteers and commanded by Santiago Liniers, a French officer in the Spanish service, attacked the British on 12 August and forced them to capitulate. The original expedition had been unauthorized but the British government was tempted into following it up and dispatched reinforcements. These captured Montevideo on 3 February 1807. Again local reaction was decisive. The incompetent viceroy was deposed by the *audiencia* and Liniers was appointed captain-general. The creole militias were once more deployed. And the invaders played into their hands. Crossing the River Plate from Montevideo, the British advanced on the centre of Buenos Aires. There they were trapped by the defenders, capitulated and agreed to withdraw.

The British invasions of Buenos Aires taught a number of lessons. Spanish Americans, it seemed, were unwilling to exchange one imperial master for another. Yet Spain could take little comfort from this. Its colonial defences had been exposed and its administration humiliated. The deposition of a viceroy was an unprecedented event with revolutionary significance. It was the local inhabitants, not Spain, who had defended the colony. The creoles in particular had tasted power, discovered their strength and acquired a new sense of identity, even of nationality. Thus, the weakness of Spain in America brought the creoles into politics.

New opportunities in government and commerce drew increasing numbers of Spaniards to America in the second half of the eighteenth century. Some sought jobs in the new bureaucracy, others followed the route of *comercio libre*. Spilling over from northern Spain, the immigrants came to form a successful entrepreneurial class, active in commerce and mining, and constantly reinforced from the peninsula, where population growth

pressed hard on land and employment and produced another justification of empire. Spanish Americans felt they were the victims of an invasion, a new colonization, a further Spanish onslaught on trade and office. Yet the facts of demography were on the side of the creoles. Around 1800 in Spanish America, according to Alexander von Humboldt, in a total population of 16.9 million, there were 3.2 million whites, and of these only 150,000 were *peninsulares*. In fact the true number of *peninsulares* was even lower than this, nearer to 30,000 and not more than 40,000 in the whole of Spanish America. Even in Mexico, the area of greatest immigration, there were only about 14,000 *peninsulares* in a total population of 6 million, of whom 1 million were whites. This minority could not expect to hold political power indefinitely. In spite of increased immigration, the population trend was against them. Independence had a demographic inevitability and simply represented the overthrow of a minority by the majority. But there was more to it than numbers.

All Spaniards might be equal before the law, whether they were *peninsulares* or creoles. But the law was not all. Essentially Spain did not trust Americans for positions of political responsibility; peninsular-born Spaniards were still preferred in higher office and transatlantic commerce. Some creoles, owners of land and perhaps of mines, had wealth enough to be classed with *peninsulares* among the elite. But the majority had only a moderate income. Some were *hacendados* struggling with mortgages and household expenses; others were managers of estates or mines, or local businessmen; others scraped a living in the professions; and some poor creoles merged into the upper ranks of the popular classes, where they were joined by *mestizos* and mulattos through marriage and social mobility. First-generation Americans felt the greatest pressure, for they were immediately challenged by a new wave of immigrants and, being nearest to the Europeans, were more acutely conscious of their own disadvantage. To the creole, therefore, office was a need not an honour. They wanted not only equality of opportunity with *peninsulares*, or a majority of appointments; they wanted them above all in their own regions, regarding creoles from another country as outsiders, hardly more welcome than *peninsulares*. During the first half of the eighteenth century the financial needs of the crown caused it to sell offices to creoles, and thus their membership of American *audiencias* became common and at times predominant. In the period 1687–1750 out of a total of 311 *audiencia* appointees 138, or 44 per cent, were creoles. During the 1760s the majority of judges in the *audiencias* of Lima,

Santiago and Mexico were creoles. The implications for imperial government were obvious. Most of the creole *oidores* (judges) were linked by kinship or interest to the landowning elite, and the *audiencias* had become a reserve of the rich and powerful families of their region, so that sale of office came to form a kind of creole representation.

The imperial government emerged from its inertia and from 1750 it began to reassert its authority, reducing creole participation in both church and state, and breaking the links between bureaucrats and local families. Higher appointments in the Church were restored to Europeans. Among the new intendants it was rare to find a creole. A growing number of senior financial officials were appointed from the peninsula. Creole military officers were replaced by Spaniards on retirement. The object of the new policy was to de-Americanize the government of America, and in this it was successful. Sale of *audiencia* office was ended, the creole share of places was reduced, and creoles were now rarely appointed in their own regions. In the period 1751–1808, of the 266 appointments in American *audiencias* only 62 (23 per cent) went to creoles, compared with 200 (75 per cent) to *peninsulares*. In 1808 of the 99 men in the colonial tribunals only 6 creoles had appointments in their own districts and 19 outside their districts.

The consciousness of difference between creoles and *peninsulares* was heightened by the new imperialism. As Alexander von Humboldt observed: 'The lowest, least educated and uncultivated European believes himself superior to the white born in the New World'.¹³ In the Río de la Plata Félix de Azara reported that mutual aversion was so great that it often existed between father and son, between husband and wife. In Mexico Lucas Alamán was convinced that this antagonism, born of the preference shown to *peninsulares* in offices and opportunities, was the 'cause' of the revolution for independence.

Modern historiography is less certain. It is argued that the function of colonial elites as economic entrepreneurs investing in agriculture, mining and trade tended to fuse the peninsular and creole groups, as did their association in urban and rural occupations. In spite of Bourbon policy, there was still a close connection between local families and the colonial bureaucracy. In Chile the creole elite was closely integrated into kinship and political groups and preferred to manipulate the administration rather than fight it. In Peru there were linked groups of landed,

¹³ Alexander von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre el reino de la Nueva España* (6th Spanish edn, 4 vols, Mexico, 1941), II, 117.

merchant, municipal and bureaucratic oligarchies, in which *peninsulares* and creoles merged as a white ruling class. In Mexico the nobility – about fifty families – combined a number of roles and offices. One group made its fortunes in overseas trade, invested profits in mines and plantations and acted primarily in the export sector. These were mainly *peninsulares*. Others, the majority of them creoles, concentrated on mining and on agriculture producing for the mining sector. They all spent heavily on conspicuous consumption, military status and the Church. And they preferred to co-opt the imperial bureaucracy by marriage and interest rather than to confront it. They found eventually that there was a limit to their influence, that Spain still thwarted Mexican development, taxed Mexican wealth and gave Mexico inferior government. While this alienated them from Bourbon policy, it did not necessarily make them supporters of independence. Everywhere in Spanish America the wars of independence, when they came, were civil wars between defenders and opponents of Spain, and the creoles were to be found on both sides. In this way functions, interests and kinship are seen as more important than the creole-peninsular dichotomy and as rendering it less significant. The argument is a useful corrective to hyperbole but it is not the whole story.

The evidence of antipathy between creoles and *peninsulares* is too specific to deny and too widespread to ignore. Their rivalry was part of the social tension of the time. Contemporaries spoke of it, travellers commented upon it, officials were impressed by it. The Spanish bureaucracy was aware of the division and so were Americans. In 1781 the *comuneros* of New Granada demanded offices for ‘creoles born in this kingdom’, and insisted that ‘nationals of this America should be preferred and privileged over Europeans’.¹⁴

In Mexico a closely knit group of peninsular immigrants who made profits in trade, finance and mining sometimes married into local wealth. Their creole heirs often lost the family fortune by investing in land, where low profits, mortgages and extravagant living frustrated their expectations and caused a resentment which, however irrational, was none the less real. In Venezuela the creole aristocracy, the *mantuanos*, were a powerful group of landowners, office-holders and *cabildo* members, who profited from trade expansion under the Bourbons to increase their exports of cacao and other commodities. But economic growth menaced as well as favoured them. Spanish monopolist merchants in

¹⁴ John Leddy Phelan, *The people and the king. The Comunero Revolution in Colombia, 1781* (Madison, 1978), 174, 179–80.

Venezuela tightened their grip on the import–export trade. Moreover, growth brought to the colony swarms of new immigrants, Basques, Catalans and above all Canarians, poor but ambitious men, who soon controlled the Venezuelan end of trade with Spain and the interior, became owners of warehouses, stores, shops and bars. No doubt the antagonism between landowners and merchants could be described as one between producers and purchasers, without invoking the creole–peninsular argument. But the fact remained that the merchants depended upon Spain for their monopoly. The British blockade enabled them to squeeze the creole producers still more, giving them minimal prices for exports and charging high for imports. So they strongly resisted neutral trade, ‘as though’, complained the Venezuelan producers in 1798, ‘our commercial laws have been established solely for the benefit of the metropolis’.¹⁵

Moreover the new *peninsulares* encroached on the political preserves of the Venezuelan aristocracy. In 1770 the crown declared the principle that European Spaniards had as much right as Americans to hold office in Venezuela. With the backing of the crown, the *peninsulares* now advanced to share *cabildo* posts with Venezuelans and to dominate the newly created *audiencia*. In Venezuela, as elsewhere, there was a Spanish reaction against creole domination in the last decades of empire, and here too office was sought by creoles not simply as an honour but as a means of controlling policy and defending their traditional privileges. The later Bourbons, in favouring *peninsulares* against creoles, in using America as a prize for Spaniards, sharpened existing divisions and increased the alienation of the creoles.

If the creoles had one eye on their masters, they kept the other on their servants. The creoles were intensely aware of social pressure from below, and they strove to keep the coloured people at a distance. Race prejudice created in Americans an ambivalent attitude towards Spain. The *peninsulares* were undoubtedly pure whites, even if they were poor immigrants. Americans were more or less white, and even the wealthiest were conscious of race mixture, anxious to prove their whiteness, if necessary by litigation. But race was complicated by social, economic and cultural interests, and white supremacy was not unchallenged; beyond its defences swarmed Indians, *mestizos*, free blacks, mulattos and slaves. In parts of Spanish America slave revolt was so fearful a prospect that

¹⁵ Miguel Izard, *El miedo a la revolución. La lucha por la libertad en Venezuela (1777–1830)* (Madrid, 1979), 127.

creoles would not lightly leave the shelter of imperial government or desert the ranks of the dominant whites. On the other hand, Bourbon policy allowed more opportunities for social mobility. The *pardos* – free black and mulattos – were allowed into the militia. They could also buy legal whiteness through purchase of *cédulas de gracias al sacar*. By law of 10 February 1795 the *pardos* were offered dispensation from the status of *infame*: successful applicants were authorized to receive an education, marry whites, hold public office and enter the priesthood. In this way the imperial government recognized the increasing numbers of the *pardos* and sought to assuage a tense social situation by removing the grosser forms of discrimination. The result was to blur the lines between whites and castes, and to enable many who were not clearly Indian or black to be regarded as socially and culturally Spanish. But the whites reacted sharply to these concessions. The demographic increase of the castes in the course of the eighteenth century, together with growing social mobility, alarmed the whites and bred in them a new awareness of race and a determination to preserve discrimination. This could be seen in the Río de la Plata, in New Granada, and in others parts of Spanish America. But it was Venezuela, with its plantation economy, slave labour force and numerous *pardos* – together forming 61 per cent of the population – which took the lead in rejecting the social policy of the Bourbons and established the climate of the revolution to come.

The whites in Venezuela were not a homogeneous class. At the top were the aristocracy of land and office, owners of slaves, producers of the colony's wealth, commanders of the colony's militia. In the middle was a group of lesser office-holders and clergy. And at the bottom surged the *blancos de orilla*, marginal whites such as shopkeepers and traders, artisans, seamen, service and transport personnel; many of these were identified with the *pardos*, whom they often married. The majority of *peninsulares* and Canarians in Venezuela belonged to these poor whites, and some of the antagonism of creoles towards *peninsulares* may well have been the resentment of patrician landowners towards common immigrants whom they regarded as of low birth. But the *peninsulares* were pure white, while many creoles were not. This simply aggravated sensitivity about race and heightened creole suspicion of *pardos*, Indians and slaves. Imperial policy increased their anger, for they considered it too indulgent towards *pardos* and slaves. The creole elite stubbornly opposed the advance of the *gente de color*, protested against the sale of whiteness, and resisted popular education and the entry of *pardos* to the University. They were concerned

among other things at the loss of a dependent labour force in a period of hacienda expansion and export growth. As *pardos* established themselves in artisan occupations, independent subsistence farming and cattle enterprises in the *llanos*, the white landowners sought to keep them in subordination and peonage. They also saw a security risk in the progress of the *pardos* and petitioned, though unsuccessfully, against their presence in the militia. They regarded it as unacceptable 'that the whites of this province should admit into their class a mulatto descended from their own slaves'; and they argued that the establishment of *pardo* militias gave the coloureds an instrument of revolution without noticeably improving imperial defence.¹⁶ These forebodings were intensified by horror of slave agitation and revolt. Again, the creole aristocracy complained that they were abandoned by the metropolis. On 31 May 1789 the Spanish government issued a new slave law, codifying legislation, clarifying the rights of slaves and duties of masters, and seeking to provide better conditions in slave life and labour. But the creole proprietors rejected state intervention between master and slave and bitterly fought this decree on the grounds that slaves were prone to vice and independence and their labour was essential to the economy. In Venezuela – indeed all over the Spanish Caribbean – planters resisted the new law and procured its suspension in 1794. The creoles were frightened men: they feared a caste war, inflamed by French revolutionary doctrine and the contagious violence of Saint-Domingue.

In other parts of Spanish America race tension took the form of direct confrontation between the white elite and the Indian masses, and here too creoles looked to their own defences. In Peru they belonged to a very small minority. In a population of 1,115,207 (1795), 58 per cent were Indians, 20 per cent *mestizos*, 10 per cent free *pardos* and slaves, and 12 per cent whites. This minority, while it controlled the economic and political life of the country, could never forget the surrounding Indian masses nor ignore the succession of rebellions against royal officials and white oppression. In Peru the creoles had no reason to doubt Spanish determination to keep the Indians in subordination; but after the great rebellion of Tupac Amaru they noticed the way in which they themselves were demoted from a security role and their militias demobilized. In Mexico, too, the social situation was explosive, and the whites were always aware of the simmering indignation of the Indians and castes, and of the

¹⁶ Representation dated 28 Nov. 1796, F. Brito Figueroa, *Las insurrecciones de los esclavos negros en la sociedad colonial venezolana* (Caracas, 1961), 22–3.

increasing lawlessness among the lower classes, to control which the military and militia were frequently deployed. Alamán described the Mexican Indians as 'an entirely separate nation; all those who did not belong to them they regarded as foreigners, and as in spite of their privileges they were oppressed by all the other classes, they in turn regarded all the others with equal hatred and distrust'. In 1799 Manuel Abad y Queipo, bishop-elect of Michoacan, remarked on the deep cleavages in Mexican society, where between the Indians and the Spaniards 'there is the conflict of interests and the hostility which invariably prevails between those who have nothing and those who have everything, between vassals and lords'.¹⁷ Traditionally the elite looked to Spain to defend them; property owners depended upon the Spanish authorities against threats from labourers and workers, and against the violence born of poverty and delinquency. But the pent-up anger of the Mexican masses exploded in 1810 in a violent social revolution, which proved to the creoles what they had long suspected, that in the final analysis they themselves were the guardians of social order and the colonial heritage. Given their numerical superiority among the whites, they had to be.

If there was a 'Spanish reaction' in the last decades of imperial rule, there was also a creole backlash. The creoles lost confidence in Bourbon government and began to doubt whether Spain had the will to defend them. Their dilemma was urgent, caught as they were between the colonial government and the mass of the people. The government had recently reduced their political influence, while the masses were a threat to their social hegemony. In these circumstances, when the monarchy collapsed in 1808, the creoles could not allow the political vacuum to remain unfilled, their lives and property unprotected. They had to move quickly to anticipate popular rebellion, convinced that if they did not seize the opportunity, more dangerous forces would do so.

The flaws in the colonial economy and the tensions in colonial society were brought to the surface in riot and rebellion. At one level these were simply responses to Bourbon policy. The development of the colonial economy and the increase of public revenue, two perfectly compatible objects in the eyes of Spanish reformers, were seen by Americans as a

¹⁷ Lucas Alamán, *Historia de México* (5 vols., Mexico, 1883–5), I, 67; Manuel Abad y Queipo, 'Estado moral y político en que se hallaba la población del virreinato de Nueva España en 1799', José María Luis Mora, *Obras sueltas* (Mexico, 1963), 204–5.

basic contradiction in imperial policy. Bourbon administration of the Indians was equally inconsistent, to the Indians if not to the crown, torn as it was between the desire to give protection against abuses and an overriding concern to maintain the number of tribute-payers and the supply of labour. The instruments of change were also judged from different standpoints. The advance of the Bourbon state, the end of decentralized government and creole participation, these were regarded by the Spanish authorities as necessary steps towards control and revival. But to the creoles it meant that in place of traditional bargaining by viceroys, who were prepared to compromise between king and people, the new bureaucracy issued non-negotiable orders from a centralized state, and to creoles this was not progress. The movements of protest, therefore, were overt resistance to government innovation, anti-tax riots and risings against specific abuses; they took place within the framework of colonial institutions and society and did not challenge them. But appearances are deceptive. Beneath the surface the rebellions revealed deeply rooted social and racial tension, conflict and instability, which lay silent throughout the eighteenth century and suddenly exploded when tax pressure and other grievances brought together a number of social groups in alliance against the administration and gave the lower sectors an opportunity to rise in protest. While they were not true social revolutions, they exposed veiled social conflicts. This can be seen in the reaction of the leading creoles. After an initial involvement in purely fiscal agitation, they usually saw the danger of more violent protest from below, directed not only against administrative authority but against all oppressors. The creoles then united with the forces of law and order to suppress the social rebels.

The typology of the rebellions was diverse. The two earliest movements, the *comuneros* of Paraguay (1721–35) and the rebellion in Venezuela (1749–52), isolated in time and space from the rest, gave indications of incipient regional awareness and a consciousness that American interests were different from Spanish interests. The rebellion in Quito in 1765, on the other hand, was a simple though violent anti-tax movement in an area of declining industry, a movement which brought into view the latent conflict between Spaniards and Americans and, as the viceroy of New Granada reported, demonstrated the creole ‘hatred of taxes, Europeans . . . and any form of subjection’.¹⁸ Tax collectors became more exigent in time of war, not simply to obtain revenue for imperial defence but also to

¹⁸ Joseph Pérez, *Los movimientos precursores de la emancipación en Hispanoamérica* (Madrid, 1977), 64.

finance Spain's war effort in Europe and elsewhere. The war of 1779–83 between Spain and Britain, therefore, weighed heavily on the colonies, as the metropolis endeavoured to force yet greater surpluses from them; resentment grew into rebellion, and soon the Andean provinces of the empire were plunged into crisis.

In 1781 New Granada erupted in a movement which provided a model sequence of Bourbon innovation, colonial resistance and renewed absolutism. The principal cause of outrage was the procedure of the regent and visitor-general, Juan Francisco Gutiérrez de Piñeres, whose ruthless methods and uncompromising demands contrasted harshly with the traditional process of bargain and compromise. He increased the *alcabala* sales tax to 4 per cent, took it out of farm into direct administration and revived an obsolete tax for naval defence. He also reorganized the tobacco and spirits monopolies, increasing the price to the consumer and, in the case of tobacco, restricting production to high quality areas. These burdens fell on a stagnant economy, poor population and, above all, numerous small farmers. After a series of protests and disturbances, serious rebellion broke out on 16 March 1781 centred on Socorro and San Gil. The rebels refused to pay taxes, attacked government warehouses, drove out the Spanish authorities and, in the name of the *común*, proclaimed a group of leaders. The chief of these was Juan Francisco Berbeo, a *hacendado* of modest means and some military experience. And soon a movement which began as a popular and predominantly *mestizo* insurrection came under the command of the creole elite of land and office, who joined it with some trepidation in order to control what they could not prevent.

The *comuneros* were a powerful force, at least in numbers, and a horde many thousands strong marched on Bogotá, together with a band of Indians. They could have broken into the capital and imposed a reign of terror on Spaniards and creoles alike. But Berbeo and his associates were not revolutionaries. The cry of their movement was the traditional one, 'Long live the king and death to bad government'. The tyranny they opposed was that of the Spanish bureaucracy, not the structure of colonial society. Berbeo and the other creoles, therefore, held back the rebel army, preferring to negotiate with Archbishop Caballero y Góngora and indirectly with the elite in Bogotá. This was the traditional way, and the result was a compromise settlement, the capitulations of Zipaquirá (8 June 1781). These provided for the suppression of the tobacco monopoly and of various taxes; the restriction and reduction of

the *alcabala* from 4 to 2 per cent; certain administrative reforms favouring local self-government; greater access to office for Americans; and improved conditions for the Indians. In effect the capitulations were negotiated by two men, Berbeo and Caballero, each convinced that it was necessary to concede something in order to avoid a more violent revolution. Berbeo was then appointed *corregidor* of Socorro, assuming that the movement was at an end. But was it?

All social sectors in the colony had some grievance against royal policy, and in the beginning the revolt reflected this. The *comunero* movement was a temporary alliance of patrician and plebeian, white and coloured, in opposition to bureaucratic oppression and fiscal innovation. The leaders were middle-rank property owners in land and business, and they headed the revolt to control it and turn it to their advantage. The creole aristocracy in Bogotá were also allies of a kind; they had tax grievances like everyone else, and they had a particular interest in a certain article of the capitulations, one which had little to do with the motives of the *común*: that, in appointments to offices, 'nationals of this America should be preferred and privileged over Europeans'.¹⁹ This satisfied the creole elite, and they were prepared to make common cause with the authorities if the insurrection went further. For there were indeed other sufferers and other wrongs. The Indians too participated in the rebellion. In Santa Fe and Tunja they demanded restitution of their lands. In the *llanos* of Casanare they rose in revolt against Spanish authority, clergy and whites. Everywhere they objected to the tribute. And the citizens of Bogotá were, if anything, more terrified of the Indians outside the gates than they they were of the *comuneros*. The Indians themselves, enraged by the invasion of their community lands (*resguardos*), were not easy allies of creole *hacendados* and land-hungry *mestizos*, many of whom had profited from the resettlement of the Indians and the auction of their lands. Although the capitulations secured a lowering of tribute and restoration of *resguardos*, they purposely stipulated that the Indians had the right to own and sell the land; this was a gain for creoles and *mestizos*, potential purchasers, rather than for the Indian communities. But the Indians were not the only frustrated *comuneros*. The rebellion also raised the hopes of the poor and dispossessed in the colony. Although they too wanted abolition of monopolies, cheaper consumer goods and freedom of production, theirs was the hatred of the poor

¹⁹ Phelan, *The people and the king*, 179–80.

against the rich, of those who had nothing against those who owned all. In the region of Antioquia *mestizos*, mulattos and other castes rioted, slaves resisted their masters and demanded freedom. And nearer the heart of the rebellion a leader emerged who represented the socially oppressed. José Antonio Galán, a man of the people, a mulatto perhaps or *mestizo*, saw the capitulations as a betrayal, a device to stop the *comuneros* entering Bogotá. He took over the more radical remnants of the movement and made it, if not a real revolution, a protest with a stronger appeal to the lower sectors, the castes and perhaps the slaves.

The creoles were outraged and collaborated with the authorities in suppressing this unauthorized extension of their movement. Former *comunero* leaders hunted down Galán, 'the Tupac Amaru of our kingdom', as they now called him, and prevented him from organizing a second march on Bogotá. As a royal official reported, 'The same captains of Socorro helped to calm the uneasy situation with promptitude, solidarity and zeal; and thus they demonstrate their loyalty, obedience and attachment to the king, and that they were only seeking to free themselves from oppressions and the intransigence of the regent'.²⁰ So the *comunero* leaders were exonerated. As for Galán and his associates, they were brutally executed, a warning to the creoles and an example to the people. In the wake of the rebellion, taxes were lowered to old levels, but the monopolies remained, and if the fiscal regime became blander it kept the same object in view, and royal revenues continued to rise. Later the *comunero* movement was considered a lost opportunity on the road to independence. At the time, however, neither the *comuneros* nor their opponents regarded it as an independence movement. The authorities played on the theme of social subversion, and the creoles showed that they feared the people more than Spain and preferred dependence to revolution.

This was true elsewhere in Spanish America. The *comunero* movement spilled over into Venezuela, where it exposed similar divisions in colonial society and came to grief in similar isolation. Overtly this too was an anti-tax and anti-monopoly rebellion, and as such it embraced all sectors of society, resentful of the increased imperial pressure exerted by the new intendancy and by the abrasive policy of the intendant, José de Abalos. As the captain general of the *comuneros*, Juan José García de Hevia, observed, 'Rich and poor, noble and commoner, all complain'.

²⁰ Report dated 2 June 1781, *Archivo del General Miranda* (24 vols., Caracas, 1929–50), xv, 42.

But they did not all react in the same way. The most violent reaction was the armed insurrection of the common people in the Andean provinces, small farmers, artisans, petty traders, labourers in town and country, sometimes joined by Indians. The caudillos of the movement came from a higher social group, who believed they could share in the benefits of the capitulations secured by the creoles of New Granada. But most men of property remained aloof. The rich creoles of Maracaibo were more interested in trade, in the expansion of production and exports, than in the grievances of the poor people of the interior. And when eventually they took notice of the *comuneros*, it was to condemn them and to offer to help repress them 'with their own persons'.²¹ The captain-general of Venezuela commended the creole aristocracy to the government for their 'spirit of loyalty and attachment to the king', and their resistance to the claims of the people. In effect, the creoles preferred Spain to anarchy; the social structure itself was the last line of Spanish defences.

This was seen most vividly in Peru, where the different worlds of whites and Indians co-existed in uneasy proximity. Yet rebellion in Peru was not exclusively Indian. There was another movement in the towns, an outburst spreading like an infection from January 1780, directed against internal customs, increased sales taxes and other forms of fiscal pressure. Although Indians from the towns and surrounding sierra joined the protest in their hundreds, more significant was the participation of poorer creoles and *mestizos*, *cholos* and other castes, resentful of the extension of tribute status to themselves. The principal centres of protest were Cuzco, Arequipa, La Paz and Cochabamba. The rebellion in La Paz called for unity of the kind shown by the North American colonists, 'worthy of memory and of our envy'.²² But creole discontent was not the same as that of the Indians, and as the tax revolts were overtaken by Indian rebellion, so the majority of creoles held back or withdrew from the urban movements. This was the case in Oruro, where a creole-led revolt in 1781 was overwhelmed numerically by Indians in alliance with *cholos*, until the creoles joined forces with the Spanish authorities to defeat and expel them.

Indian grievances were more serious and their causes more profound, stemming as they did from the tyranny of the *corregidores*, simultaneously

²¹ Carlos E. Muñoz Oraá, *Los comuneros de Venezuela* (Merida, 1971), 136–7; Pérez, *Los movimientos precursoros*, 105.

²² Boleslao Lewin, *La rebelión de Tupac Amaru y los orígenes de la emancipación americana* (Buenos Aires, 1957), 151.

officials, judges and merchants to the Indians; from the inflexible demands upon them for tribute, taxes and tithes; from the *reparto*, or imposition of goods; and from the *mita* system with its inhuman conditions of forced labour, especially in the mines of Potosí. Among the many Bourbon expedients two in particular, the raising of the *alcabala* from 4 to 6 per cent and the establishment of internal customs posts to ensure collection, weighed heavily on Indian producers and traders as well as consumers and served to alienate the middle groups of Indian society and to nurture a rebel leadership. Peru was the scene of recurring Indian rebellions throughout the eighteenth century, culminating in that led by José Gabriel Tupac Amaru, an educated *cacique* and a descendant of the Inca royal family. Tupac Amaru began peaceful agitation for reform in the 1770s and first sought justice in the Spanish courts. When this failed, and as visitor-general José Antonio de Areche turned the screw tighter on Indian Peru, he led his followers into violent insurrection, attacking *corregidores*, sacking *obrajes* and occupying villages. Beginning near Cuzco in November 1780, the movement soon engulfed a great part of southern Peru, then in a second and more radical phase spread to the Aymara provinces of Upper Peru. The extended family and kinship network of Tupac Amaru and its links with regional trade and transport gave the whole movement a coherent chain of command, a source of recruitment and continuity of leadership. But the greatest impetus came from the cause itself.

Tupac Amaru declared war to the death against the Spaniards, and his stated object was 'to extinguish the *corregidores* . . . to abolish the Potosí *mitas*, the *alcabalas*, the internal customs, and many other pernicious exactions'. He also endeavoured to give his movement a universal character, appealing across social divisions. He called on the creoles to join with the Indians 'to destroy the Europeans', and he claimed to stand for 'the protection, perservation and tranquility of the Europeans'.²³ The attempt to revive the creole alliance failed. The social policy of Tupac Amaru was too revolutionary to satisfy more than the dispossessed. He attacked forced labour and promised to free slaves, or at least those who joined his forces. He sought to destroy *obrajes* and *repartimientos de comercio*, while his followers attacked white towns and their inhabitants indiscriminately. Horrified by the enormity of the rebellion, the creoles made common cause with Spaniards in defence of their inheritance.

²³ *Ibid.*, 402-3, 415-16, 422-3.

Church and state, creole and European, the whole established order closed ranks against Tupac Amaru, and after a violent struggle in which 100,000 lives were lost, most of them Indian, the movement collapsed. The Indian leaders were brutally executed, their followers hunted down, and by January 1782, after a short but severe shock, the Spaniards were again in control. A few institutional reforms were then applied – intendants replaced *corregidores* and *repartimiento* was abolished – but these were designed for imperial strength rather than Indian welfare.

Did Tupac Amaru aspire to independence? The Spanish authorities claimed that he did, and sympathisers in other parts of America saw him as king of Peru. He undoubtedly became more radical once the revolution began, but independence was something else. The documentary evidence is unclear, even suspect. In any case, freedom from Spain was only part of his movement. The real revolution was against the privileges of the whites, creoles as well as Spaniards, and the ultimate aim was to end the subordination of the Indians. These were essentially social objectives. As for independence, it was unlikely that an Indian rebellion would have had the ideas, organization and military resources necessary for such a cause. The Indians also lacked solidarity. During the rebellion of Tupac Amaru at least twenty *caciques*, motivated in part by personal and tribal rivalry or already recruited into the Spanish system, kept their people loyal to the crown and in some cases joined the royalist forces. Indian rebellions lacked a further condition for independence, creole leadership. The creoles were committed to the existing economic structure, and this was based upon Indian labour in the mines, haciendas and workshops. And, outnumbered as they were, they hesitated to put themselves at the head of a movement which they might not be able to control. Independence, when it came, would be on different terms.

The rebellions of the eighteenth century, therefore, were not strictly speaking ‘antecedents’ of independence. It is true that the Spanish authorities denounced them as subversive, either out of apprehension or for purposes of propaganda. Intendant Abalos argued that the root cause of all the rebellions of 1780–1 was not taxation ‘but the hostility of these natives towards Spain and their fervent desire for independence’.²⁴ This was more than the rebels themselves envisaged. They appealed rather to past utopias, to a pre-Caroline golden age when bureaucratic centralization and tax oppression were unknown. Nevertheless, although the

²⁴ Representation to Charles III, Caracas, 24 Sept. 1781, Muñoz Oraá, *Los comueros de Venezuela*, 39.

rebels did not formulate ideas of independence, they helped to create a climate of opinion which presented a fundamental challenge to traditional rule. They proved in effect that the formula 'Viva el rey y muera el mal gobierno' was obsolete; as a medium of protest it was no longer realistic, discredited not least by the Bourbons themselves, whose policy of centralization invalidated the old distinction between king and government and made the crown frankly responsible for the actions of its servants. The rebellions moreover underlined the fact that the new government came from outside. In this sense they were a further stage in the development of colonial self-awareness, a brighter if unexplained sign of incipient nationalism, a dramatic defence of identity and interests which were demonstrably different from those of the metropolis. The *comuneros* expressed a belief that New Granada was their country, that it belonged to the people who were born and lived there, and that these natural proprietors were threatened by Spanish intruders. Even the rebellion in Peru emitted a sense of nationality. Tupac Amaru spoke of *paisanos*, *compatriotas*, meaning Peruvians as distinct from European Spaniards. In his proclamation of 16 November 1780, offering freedom to the slaves, he called on *la Gente Peruana* to help him confront the *Gente Europea*, on behalf of the 'common good of this kingdom'.²⁵ The *Gente Peruana*, whom he also called the *gente nacional*, consisted of whites, *mestizos*, Indians, all the natives of Peru, the only criterion being that they were distinct from the foreigners. These ideas were natural products of colonial experience. They were not, however, representative of the Indian movement as a whole.

Incipient nationalism was a potent influence but not an Indian one. The manifestos of Tupac Amaru expressed créole rather than Indian concepts, the ideas of a precocious leader, not of a typical Indian. The Indians and other marginalized elements of colonial society could have little if any sense of national identity, and their closest relations were with the hacienda, the community, or the local administration, not with a wider entity. The expectations of the creoles, on the other hand, reflected a deeper awareness, a developing sense of identity, a conviction that they were Americans, not Spaniards. This presentiment of nationality was far more subversive of Spanish sovereignty and far more conducive to independence than specific demands for reform and change. At the same

²⁵ *Colección documental de la independencia del Perú* (30 vols., Lima, 1971), II, ii, 272.

time as Americans began to disavow Spanish nationality they were also aware of differences among themselves, for even in the pre-national state the various colonies rivalled each other in their resources and their pretensions. America was too vast a continent and too vague a concept to attract individual loyalty. Men were primarily Mexicans, Venezuelans, Peruvians, Chileans, and it was in their own country, not America, that they found their national home. These countries were defined by their history, administrative boundaries, physical environment, which marked them off not only from Spain but also from each other; they were the homes of societies, each of them unique, and economies, all with different interests.

From what sources was this national consciousness fed? Americans were rediscovering their own lands in a uniquely American literature. Creole writers in Mexico, Peru and Chile expressed and nurtured a new awareness of *patria* and a greater sense of exclusiveness, for as the *Mercurio Peruano* observed: 'It interests us more to know what is happening in our own nation.'²⁶ Among the first to give cultural expression to Americanism were the creole Jesuits expelled from their homeland in 1767, who became in exile the literary precursors of American nationalism. The Peruvian Jesuit Juan Pablo Viscardo was an ardent advocate of independence, to the cause of which he bequeathed his *Lettre aux Espagnols-Américains*, published in 1799. 'The New World', wrote Viscardo, 'is our homeland, and its history is ours, and it is in this history that we ought to seek the causes of our present situation.'²⁷ Viscardo's treatise was a call to revolutionary action. The majority of the Jesuit exiles, however, had a different object, to dispel European ignorance of their countries; so they described the nature and history of their homelands, their resources and assets, producing in the process works of scholarship as well as of literature. If it was not yet a national literature, it contained an essential ingredient of nationalism, awareness of the *patria's* historical past. But the real significance of the Jesuit works lay not in direct influence – few of them were published in Spanish in their lifetime – but in the way they reflected the thinking of other less articulate Americans. When the creoles themselves expressed their patriotism it was usually more optimistic than that of the exiles. The pre-independence period saw the birth of a literature of identity in which Americans

²⁶ R. Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del Perú. Virreinato (Siglo XVIII)* (Buenos Aires, 1957), 36.

²⁷ Miguel Batllori, *El Abate Viscardo. Historia y mito de la intervención de los Jesuitas en la independencia de Hispanoamérica* (Caracas, 1953), Apéndice, p. viii.

glorified their countries, acclaimed their resources and appraised their peoples. As they instructed their compatriots in their assets, so these authors pointed to American qualifications for office and in effect for self-government. The terms themselves instilled confidence through repetition – *patria*, homeland, nation, our America, we Americans. Although this was still a cultural rather than a political nationalism and was not incompatible with imperial unity, yet it prepared men's minds for independence by reminding them that America had independent resources and the people to manage them.

The new Americanism was a more powerful influence than the Enlightenment. The ideas of the French *philosophes*, their criticism of contemporary social, political and religious institutions, their concern for human freedom, were not unknown in the Hispanic world, though they did not receive universal acceptance, and the majority of people remained Catholic in conviction and devoted to absolute monarchy. The Spanish version of the Enlightenment purged it of ideology and reduced it to a programme of modernization within the established order. As applied to America this meant making the imperial economy a more fruitful source of wealth and power and improving the instruments of control. 'To bring my royal revenues to their proper level', this was how Charles III expressed his colonial policy in 1776, and it had little to do with the Enlightenment. And if in Spain itself only marginal changes occurred after 1765, in Spanish America values and structures remained equally inviolate. In this context it may be questioned whether 'Enlightenment' or even 'reform' are appropriate terms in which to describe Spain's imperial policy or its ideological environment in the period 1765–1810. There was, of course, a sense in which modernization owed something to the thought of the eighteenth century: the value attached to useful knowledge, the attempts to improve production by means of applied science, the belief in the beneficent influence of the state, these were reflections of their time. As Archbishop Viceroy Caballero y Góngora explained to his successor, it was necessary to substitute the useful and exact sciences for pointless speculations, and in a kingdom such as New Granada, with products to exploit, roads to build, mines and swamps to drain, there was more need of people trained to observe and measure than to philosophize. Modernization of this kind was more concerned with technology than with politics. The Spanish 'Enlightenment' in America was really little more than a programme of renewed imperialism.

But Spanish America could also obtain the new philosophy directly from its sources in England, France and Germany. The literature of the Enlightenment circulated with relative freedom. In Mexico there was a public for Newton, Locke and Adam Smith, for Descartes, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Condillac and D'Alembert. Readers were to be found among high officials, members of the merchant and professional classes, university personnel and ecclesiastics. Peru was the home of a group of intellectuals, many of them products of the royal college of San Carlos, members of the Economic Society and contributors to the *Mercúrio Peruano*, who were acquainted with the writings of Locke, Descartes and Voltaire, and familiar with ideas of social contract, the primacy of reason and the cult of freedom. But what did this mean? The Enlightenment was by no means universal in America nor, once implanted, did it survive intact: its growth was meagre, weakened by conservatism and confined by tradition. Chronologically its impact was late. The revolutions of 1780–1 owed little, if anything, to the thought of the Enlightenment, and it was only between then and 1810 that it began to take root. Diffusion increased in the 1790s: in Mexico the Inquisition began to react, alarmed less by religious heterodoxy than by the political content of the new philosophy, which it regarded as seditious, 'contrary to the security of states', full of 'general principles of equality and liberty for all men', and in some cases a medium for news of 'the frightful and damaging revolution in France'.²⁸ In general, however, the Enlightenment inspired in its creole disciples not so much a philosophy of liberation as an independent attitude towards received ideas and institutions, a preference for reason over authority, experiment over tradition, science over speculation. No doubt these were enduring influences in Spanish America, but for the moment they were agents of reform, not destruction.

Yet there remained a number of creoles who looked beyond reform to revolution. Francisco de Miranda, who had read the works of the *philosophes* during his army service in Spain in the 1770s, transformed ideology into activism. So, of course, did Simón Bolívar, whose liberal education, wide reading and extensive travels in Europe opened his mind to new horizons, in particular to English political example and the thought of the Enlightenment. Hobbes and Locke, the encyclopaedists and *philosophes*, especially Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau, all left a

²⁸ M. L. Pérez Marchand, *Dos etapas ideológicas del siglo XVIII en México a través de los papeles de la Inquisición* (Mexico, 1945), 122–4.

deep impression upon his mind and gave him a lifelong devotion to reason, freedom and order. In the Río de la Plata Manuel Belgrano read extensively in the new philosophy. Mariano Moreno, product of the University of Chuquisaca in company with other revolutionaries, was an enthusiastic admirer of Rousseau, whose *Social Contract* he edited in 1810 'for the instruction of young Americans'.

In New Granada a group of educated creoles, politically more advanced than the *comuneros*, were the nucleus of radical opposition to the Spanish regime. Pedro Fermín de Vargas carried enlightenment to the point of subversion. From Zipaquirá, where he was *corregidor*, he fled abroad in 1791–2 in search of foreign aid for his revolutionary schemes. He declared to the British government that Spanish Americans and Indians were treated like foreigners and slaves in their own country and had reached the point of insurrection: 'the population of the country is sufficient to aspire to independence and the kingdom of New Granada is now like an eldest son who needs to emancipate himself'.²⁹ To finance his flight he sold his books to Antonio Nariño, a wealthy young creole of Bogotá. In 1793 Nariño printed on his own press a translation of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, a document which had already been prohibited in America by the Inquisition of Cartagena. The edition of a hundred copies was printed only to be destroyed, and its publisher was subsequently exiled for treason. Nariño was a friend of Francisco Javier Espejo, a *mestizo* doctor and lawyer of Quito, and another disciple of the Enlightenment. In a series of satirical publications Espejo savagely criticized the defects of the Quito economy and denounced Spanish rule as their cause. In 1795 he too was jailed on charges of subversion. Although Spanish authorities dealt with this creole opposition as a conspiracy, in fact the events of 1793–5 were examples of propaganda rather than revolution and they were confined to the elite. They had some importance in showing the influence of the French Revolution, but no firm power base.

The conspiracy of Manuel Gual and José María España was more serious, as it frankly sought to establish an independent republic of Venezuela. The two Venezuelans were prompted by a Spanish exile, Juan Bautista Picornell, reader of Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists and a confirmed republican. Recruiting *pardos* and poor whites, labourers and small proprietors, the conspiracy came to the surface in La Guaira in

²⁹ Vargas to British government, 20 Nov. 1799, *Archivo del General Miranda*, xv, 388.

July 1797 with an appeal for equality as well as liberty, for harmony between all classes, the abolition of Indian tribute and of negro slavery, and the establishment of freedom of trade. The conspirators attacked 'the bad colonial government' and invoked the example of the English colonies in North America. The formula of previous risings, 'viva el rey y muera el mal gobierno', they rejected as self-contradictory. Either the king knew what his government was doing and approved, or he did not know and failed in his duty. They wanted a republic, nothing less; but they received little response. Creole property owners collaborated with the authorities in suppressing the men of La Guaira, offering to serve the captain-general 'with their persons and resources'. The movement was doomed by its radicalism.

These men were true precursors of independence, though they were a small minority and ahead of public opinion. The creoles had many objections to the colonial regime, but these were pragmatic rather than ideological; in the ultimate analysis the greatest threat to Spanish rule came from American interests rather than European ideas. Yet the distinction perhaps is unreal. The thought of the Enlightenment was part of the complex of contributing factors, at once an impulse, a medium and a justification of the revolution to come. If the Enlightenment was not an isolated 'cause' of independence, it was part of its history; it provided some of the ideas which informed it and became an essential ingredient of Latin American liberalism in the post-independence period. During the wars of independence and after, men of identical economic interest and social position frequently took opposite political standpoints. Ideas had their own power, convictions their own persuasion.

The Enlightenment was brought into political focus by the revolutions in North America and France. In the years around 1810 the influence of the United States was exerted by its mere existence, and the close example of liberty and republicanism remained an active inspiration in Spanish America, one as yet unsullied by misgivings concerning the policy of this powerful neighbour. As early as 1777 a Spanish version of proclamations of the Continental Congress (1774-5) was in the hands of Dr José Ignacio Moreno, subsequently rector of the Central University of Venezuela and participant in the conspiracy of 1797. The works of Tom Paine, the speeches of John Adams, Jefferson and Washington all circulated in the subcontinent. Many of the precursors and leaders of independence visited the United States and saw free institutions at first hand. It was in New York, in 1784, that Francisco de Miranda conceived

the idea of 'the liberty and independence of the whole Spanish American continent'. Bolívar had an enduring respect for Washington and admired, though not uncritically, the progress of the United States, 'land of freedom and home of civic virtue', as he described it. United States trade with Spanish America was a channel not only of goods and services but also of books and ideas. Copies of the Federal Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, in Spanish translation, were carried into the area by United States merchants, whose liberal views coincided with their interest in the growth of a monopoly-free market. After 1810 Spanish Americans would look for guidance to the republican experience of their northern neighbour in their search for the rights of life, liberty and happiness. Constitutions in Venezuela, Mexico and elsewhere would be closely modelled on that of the United States, and many of the new leaders – though not Bolívar – would be profoundly influenced by North American federalism.

The model of revolution offered by France had less appeal. As Miranda observed in 1799, 'We have before our eyes two great examples, the American and the French Revolutions. Let us prudently imitate the first and carefully shun the second.'³⁰ First impressions had raised greater hopes. Manuel Belgrano described in his autobiography the response of young intellectuals – he was then in Spain – to the events of 1789: 'the ideas of liberty, equality, security and property took a firm hold on me, and I saw only tyrants in those who would prevent a man, wherever he might be, from enjoying the rights with which God and Nature had endowed him'.³¹ The Spanish government attempted to prevent French news and propaganda from reaching its subjects, but the barriers were breached by a flood of revolutionary literature in Spain and America. Some read the new material out of curiosity. Others instinctively recognized their spiritual home, embracing the principles of liberty and applauding the rights of man. Equality was another matter. Situated as they were between the Spaniards and the masses, the creoles wanted more than equality for themselves and less than equality for their inferiors. The more radical the French Revolution became and the better it was known, the less it appealed to the creole aristocracy. They saw it as a monster of extreme democracy and anarchy, which, if admitted into America, would destroy the world of privilege they enjoyed. The danger was not remote.

³⁰ Miranda to Gual, 31 Dec. 1799, *ibid.*, xv, 404.

³¹ Manuel Belgrano, *Autobiografía* (Buenos Aires, 1945), 13–18.

In 1791 the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue was engulfed in a massive slave revolt. Saint-Domingue was a prototype, the most productive colony in the New World, its sole function to export sugar and coffee to the metropolis. For this purpose France had established a military and bureaucratic presence, a plantation economy and a slave labour force held down by violence. The social situation was always explosive, not simply because of the merciless exploitation of half a million slaves and the degradation of the free coloureds, but also because of divisions within the white minority. In its spectacle of disintegration, of *grand blanc* against *petit blanc*, white against mulatto, mulatto against black, Saint-Domingue was colonial America in microcosm. The Revolution of 1789 acted as an instant dissolvent, arousing different responses to the opportunity of liberty and equality, and releasing social and racial tensions long suppressed. In the knowledge that the master race was hopelessly divided, the slaves rose in revolt in August 1791, attacked plantations and their owners, and began a long and ferocious struggle for abolition of slavery and independence from France. French policy wavered between abolition decreed by the National Assembly and the attempt of Napoleon to reconquer the island for France and slavery. But in the end France had to admit defeat, and on 1 January 1804 black and mulatto generals proclaimed the new state of Haiti, the first black republic in the Americas.

To Spanish America Haiti was an example and a warning, observed by rulers and ruled alike with growing horror. The creoles could now see the inevitable result of loss of unity in the metropolis, loss of nerve by the authorities, and loss of control by the colonial ruling class. Haiti represented not only independence but revolution, not only liberty but equality. The new regime systematically exterminated the remaining whites and prevented any white from re-establishing himself as a proprietor; it recognized as Haitian any black and mulatto of African descent born in other colonies, slave or free, and these were invited to desert; and it declared war on the slave trade. These social and racial policies branded Haiti as an enemy in the eyes of all colonial and slave regimes in the Americas, and they took immediate steps to protect themselves, none more vigorously than Spain, which in the course of the Haitian revolution had lost the adjacent colony of Santo Domingo. In November 1791, within three months of the outbreak, Spanish colonial authorities were warned to adopt defensive measures against contagion. Haitian blacks were denied entry to Spanish colonies, and even white refugees were suspect.

Venezuela was regarded as particularly vulnerable to penetration, partly because of its proximity, partly because of its own history of slave protest, resistance and escape throughout the eighteenth century. Blacks and mulattos from the French Antilles, fleeing from Napoleon's counter-offensive, made their way via Trinidad to the eastern coasts of Venezuela, to become in the official view a potential fifth column. Alerted by the advance of their own *pardos*, the creoles of Venezuela reacted sharply. The *audiencia* of Caracas sought to protect the institution of slavery against French revolutionary doctrines, 'capable of prejudicing the minds of simple people especially the slaves, who number more than 100,000 in this province alone'. Evidence was at hand. In 1795 a black and *pardo* revolt convulsed Coro, the centre of the sugar-cane industry and the base of a white aristocracy extremely conscious of race and class. The movement was led by José Leonardo Chirino and José Caridad González, free negroes who had travelled about the Caribbean and learnt of events in France and Haiti. They mobilized the slaves and coloured labourers, three hundred of whom rose in May 1795, and proclaimed 'the law of the French, the republic, the freedom of the slaves, and the suppression of the *alcabala* and other taxes'.³² The rebels occupied haciendas, sacked property, killed landowners and invaded the city of Coro; but they were isolated, easily crushed, and many of them were shot without trial. The Haitian revolution had further repercussions. In May 1799 a corsair expedition from Port-au-Prince sought to collaborate with a rebellion in Maracaibo, where two hundred men of the *pardo* militia set out to kill whites, establish 'the system of liberty and equality' and create a black republic as in Haiti, beginning with the abolition of slavery. It was another failure, but another example of that constant underlying struggle of blacks against whites which characterized the last years of the colonial regime.

Spanish American revolutionaries anxiously disassociated themselves from the Haitian revolution. Miranda in particular was concerned about its effect on his reputation in England: 'I confess that much as I desire the liberty and independence of the New World, I fear anarchy and revolution even more. God forbid that the other countries suffer the same fate as Saint-Domingue, scene of carnage and crimes, committed on the pretext of establishing liberty; better that they should remain another century under the barbarous and senseless oppression of Spain.'³³

³² Pedro M. Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros en la serranía de Coro* (Caracas, 1949), 38.

³³ Miranda to Turnbull, 12 Jan. 1798, *Archivo del General Miranda*, xv, 207.

Miranda argued that it was vital for him to reach Venezuela first, before the Haitians did, and in 1806 he led a tiny expedition to his homeland. Unfortunately for his reputation he stopped to re-group in Haiti, where he was advised not to be content with exhorting the creoles to rise but 'to cut off heads and burn property', and where a rumour started that he planned to use black Haitians.³⁴ In fact, Miranda was as socially conservative as other creoles and he had no intention of inciting a race war. But the damage was done. At Coro he was met first by a stony silence then by opposition from creole landowners, who denounced him as a 'heretic' and a 'traitor'.

If Haiti was a warning, therefore, it was also an incentive. Spanish Americans, too, would soon be faced with a crisis in the metropolis and a failure of imperial control. Then they would have to fill the political vacuum, and they would seize independence not to create another Haiti but to prevent one.

Crisis came in 1808, the culmination of two decades of depression and war. The modest progress of Bourbon reform in Spain was cut short by the impact of the French Revolution, which drove frightened ministers into reaction and a bewildered king into the arms of Manuel Godoy. As leadership declined from the standards of Charles III and his reforming ministers to those of Charles IV and the court favourite, government was reduced to mere patronage at home and clientage abroad. The Spanish people suffered severe adversity. The great agrarian crisis of 1803 was a time of acute famine, hunger and mortality, proof of how little the Bourbons had done to improve agriculture, trade and communications. Meanwhile, in spite of its efforts to maintain national independence, the government had neither the vision nor the resources to resolve the pressing problems of foreign policy. The French alliance did not save Spain: it merely emphasized her weakness, prolonged her wars and exposed her colonial commerce to British attack. Spanish American visitors to the peninsula in these years were horrified by what they saw, a once powerful metropolis enfeebled to the point of collapse and grateful enough to be a satellite of France. Now more than ever they realized that Spanish interests were not their interests, that America 'needed to be neutral to be happy', as Servando Teresa de Mier put it. Worse was to come. When, in 1807–8, Napoleon decided to reduce Spain totally to his

³⁴ Paul Verna, *Pétion y Bolívar* (Caracas, 1969), 95.

will and invaded the peninsula, Bourbon government was divided against itself and the country left defenceless against attack. In March 1808 a palace revolution forced Charles IV to dismiss Godoy and to abdicate in favour of his son, Ferdinand. The French then occupied Madrid, and Napoleon induced Charles and Ferdinand VII to proceed to Bayonne for discussions. There, on 5 May 1808, he forced both of them to abdicate and in the following month proclaimed Joseph Bonaparte king of Spain and the Indies.

In Spain the people rose and began to fight for their independence. At the end of May 1808 provincial juntas organized resistance to the invader, and in September a central junta was formed which invoked the name of the king, sought to unite the opposition to France and, in January 1809, issued a decree that the dominions in America were not colonies but an integral part of the Spanish monarchy.

These events created in America a crisis of political legitimacy and power. Authority came traditionally from the king; laws were obeyed because they were the king's laws. Now there was no king to obey. This also brought into question the structure of power and its distribution between imperial officials and the local ruling class. The creoles had to decide upon the best way to preserve their heritage and to maintain their control. Spanish America could not remain a colony without a metropolis, or a monarchy without a monarch.