DOCUMENTING LATIN AMERICA

Gender, Race, and Empire
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Gender, Race, and Empire

Volume 1

Edited by
ERIN E. O’CONNOR
Bridgewater State College

LEO J. GAROFALO
Connecticut College

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Although the numerous ways of analyzing the past are part of what make the study of history interesting, they also make it challenging to create texts and document collections that are both meaningful and accessible. Trying to cover everything can make it difficult for readers to keep track of a book’s central purpose, whereas too narrow of a focus fails to provide a broader sense of the course of history. To avoid being either too general or too narrow, Documenting Latin America focuses on the central themes of race, gender, and politics and develops them deeply.

The majority of primary-source documents in these volumes have been translated and introduced by scholars who have used them in their research. A few of these sources are from works already published in Latin America, but most of them came from either state or religious archives, and none of the archival documents have ever appeared before in English. These archival sources are the heart of Documenting Latin America, uncovering many different ways that race, gender, and politics have intertwined over the course of centuries to make Latin America the complex and fascinating world region it is today. Some of the materials derived from scholarly research explore Latin American history, politics, and culture from the perspectives of less-powerful peoples, whereas others address the importance of race and gender from the viewpoints of political and intellectual elites. Additionally, the editors have identified and presented document excerpts that they refer to as classic documents that have long been available in English. They have chosen these sources based on their importance to the themes of the volume, their accessibility, and their proven success in stimulating classroom discussion.

The chapters in Documenting Latin America offer a broad scope and solid coverage of Latin American history. In each volume, documents presented come from many different regions of Latin America, and they consider themes and challenges particular to different periods of time. However, the editors have not attempted to give equal coverage to all regions and problems in Latin American history. Instead, the editors selected documents either to complement others in the volumes or to offer unique perspectives on historical problems. Using these criteria allowed for the inclusion of documents from areas of Latin America that cannot be found in many, if any, other volumes available at the time of this publication. This unique blend of perspectives of history from both above and below, from understudied as well as often-studied regions, and from a combination of archival and classic sources allows readers to engage in a meaningful way with Latin America’s past.

To aid readers in the task of interpreting original sources, these volumes are broken down into sections, each of which contains several chapters focused around a central theme or historical development. The introduction to each section defines any unusual or important terms, identifies key issues in
a particular era, and relates terms and problems to the documentary history’s broader focus on race, gender, and politics. Each chapter also begins with a short introduction that provides the reader with the context in which the document took place. The introduction is followed by a brief list of questions to consider when analyzing the document. The central feature of each chapter is a short document or set of documents. Most of the sources are excerpts from longer documents, but they provide readers with ample text and information to develop their own understanding of Latin American history. Using analytical guidelines from the questions, and context from the introduction, in conjunction with evidence from the document, helps readers to analyze the document and to form an argument about a given event or problem in Latin American history. Similarly, reviewing the introduction to the section in which a chapter appears can help to place an individual case within a wider historical moment or trend. The interplay between the details in the documents with the images and broader issues presented in various introductory materials gives the best picture of the dynamics of gender, race, and politics in Latin America.

Each chapter offers italicized terms, questions for further study, and an annotated list of suggested sources. Italicized terms, institutions, and names are defined in the text or footnotes; if they appear frequently in the volume, they are also listed in the glossary at the end of the book. In addition to facilitating reading comprehension, the glossary also provides information about how some of these terms had distinct meanings in different regions or time periods. The questions offered in each chapter not only help readers to make sense of the document at hand, but they also provide potential topics for papers, exams, and in-class discussions. In addition, the suggested sources section at the end of each chapter shows where one can find more secondary or scholarly sources, primary documents published in English, and visual and film materials. This section provides a brief description of each item listed, and it is particularly useful for readers who want to explore further the issues raised in the chapter for a research paper, class presentation, or other class activities. The editors and contributors of the volumes have recommended a variety of materials, including in many cases Web sites, documentaries, feature films, and literature. Each chapter can therefore be used to obtain either a solid understanding of one case and a particular point or serve as a springboard for launching a larger project following a reader’s personal interests.

Acknowledgments

This document history has been, from its inception, the epitome of collaborative work. We are tremendously grateful to everyone who made it possible for us to see our vision through to publication. First and foremost we thank our contributors, wonderful scholars all, who shared their expertise and time to create a unique and valuable resource. They responded with enthusiasm to our project and with good humor when we pressed them to meet deadlines or make changes. We also wish to thank the many fine individuals at Pearson who made it possible to complete this project. While working on the volumes, Erin benefitted greatly from a Bridgewater State College (BSC) Faculty and Librarian Research Grant (2009), which provided course release. Leo appreciates years of generous research support from Connecticut College’s R.F. Johnson and Hodgkin Faculty Development Funds.

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College students remain at the heart of this document history. Striving to make Latin American history come alive for our students led us to create these volumes. We especially thank the students—too many to name individually—who tested all or parts of these volumes in classes. Erin thanks her BSC

Finally, we must acknowledge our debts to our families and friends who sacrificed time with us so that we could work on this project, and who put up with hearing about it more than they probably wanted to. Friends, you know who you are. And to Eliana Iberico Garofalo, Natalia Garofalo-Iberico, Howard Brenner, Samuel Brenner, and (last but of course not least) Anya Brenner: You are, as you know, always and forever in our hearts.

Erin E. O'Connor, Bridgewater State College
Leo J. Garofalo, Connecticut College
Maps

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Iberian Conquests and Indigenous Peoples

Colonial Trade

Source: Adapted from Colonial Latin America, 2nd ed. by Mark Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson (1994): Volume 1 Map 3A. By Permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.
Colonial Latin American Viceroyalties

Independence Struggles and New Nations, 1811–1839

Introduction

“Doing” Latin American History in the Era of Empires

There are many different ways of approaching and studying history. To make sense of the past, professional historians not only specialize in particular world regions, but they also focus on specific types of history—such as political, cultural, economic, military, or social history. Historians also differ in their specific focus within a field of study. For example, some political historians might examine history from the perspective of central government officials, whereas others explore how ordinary men and women experienced and influenced politics. Similarly, many economic historians trace how goods were produced and exchanged between different world regions, but there are numerous others who study labor relations. Social and cultural historians often look at history from the perspectives of less-powerful groups in past societies or at the interactions between powerful and less-powerful individuals and groups, and their work often overlaps at least as much with anthropology as it does with other fields of history.

Documenting Latin America focuses on the central themes of race, gender, and politics. These themes are especially important for understanding and evaluating the history of Latin America, where identities were forged out of the conflicts, negotiations, and intermixing of peoples from Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Over time, and due largely to unequal power relations that were central features of colonialism, racial ideologies developed to justify European domination over indigenous and African peoples. Gender, too, played a pivotal role in determining colonial experiences: Not only were women denied access to political (and often economic) power, but Spanish colonizers also used gender ideas to justify their dominance over non-European peoples. Race and gender inequalities continued to haunt Latin American nations in the aftermath of independence; in fact, one often finds greater constraints on indigenous peoples, Afro-Latin Americans, and women of all classes and races after independence than during the colonial period. By the mid-twentieth century, based largely on non-Europeans’ and women’s own initiatives, state officials began to offer some political rights and social reforms to previously marginalized groups. Today, women and non-Europeans still face serious challenges with sexism and racism, but they have also carved out important niches for themselves in Latin American national politics.

Documentary sources presenting gender, race, and politics, therefore, provide readers with the tools to develop a broad understanding of the course of Latin American social, cultural, and political history. However, the purpose of focusing on a particular theme or angle of history is not to ignore other avenues of exploration. Although historians specialize in particular fields of historical inquiry, every scholar must explain how her or his specialty relates to other fields in order to create a meaningful narrative about the past. The same occurs with chapters in this volume: The histories of race and gender explored in the ensuing chapters also draw on labor, biographical, economic, and military histories to offer a full and balanced picture of Latin America.

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xxvi Introduction

Powerful Terms, Terms of Power

Gender. Race. State. Empire. Nation. Subaltern. Elite. All of these are central concepts developed in Documenting Latin America. However, none of these terms are simple or static; instead, they are complex and change over time. Furthermore, scholars sometimes disagree on how to define terms and how they function in history. It is, therefore, important to discuss how the editors and contributors of these volumes define, approach, and engage with core terminology throughout the chapters of this collection of primary-source documents.

Politics, Power, and Belonging: States, Empires, and Nations

When one thinks of the state, it is typically state institutions, such as ministries of finance or Superior Courts, that come to mind, or perhaps the state officials who administer these organizations at the central, regional, and local levels. Members of a country, however, sense that the state is more than just institutions and administrators: Many U.S. citizens, for instance, take particular pride in living under a state that they believe advances the rule of law, equality before the law, justice, and freedom. All states are comprised of two components that operate simultaneously: The state system includes government infrastructure, the administrative hierarchy, and policies; equally important, the state idea indicates a set of ideologies aimed at legitimizing a given ruling regime.1 To function, a state system requires a significant portion of the population to accept the state idea, and no state idea can succeed in the long term if a viable state system is lacking. This description of the state can help readers to understand two central features of Latin American politics since 1500 that are apparent in historical documents. First, the state is made up of a series of practices that institutionalize unequal power relations, whether between local versus central government officials, between state authorities and the poor, or between men and women. Second, although the poor, non-Europeans, and women were excluded from government institutions throughout most of history, the existence of state ideas that required some degree of ideological acceptance gave less-powerful peoples opportunities to interact with, take advantage of, and even shape the state. Many of the chapters in these volumes reveal ways in which both the powerful and the humble played roles in the historical development of Latin American politics and states. Latin America also underwent a shift from empires in the pre-Hispanic and colonial periods to nation states following independence. As with the broader concept of the state, empires and nation states are terms that require explicit discussion and definition.

Latin America’s colonial history encompasses a period when Portuguese and Spanish emperors ruled almost all of the Western hemisphere’s territory, population, and wealth (mines, plantations, taxes, and tribute). Even before the arrival of Europeans, imperial rulers dominated the most densely populated regions of the Americas, with the Aztecs controlling the large urban centers of the Valley of Mexico and the Incas presiding over the peasant populations of the Andes. On the most basic level, the term empire describes the political organization of a collection of states and territories ruled by an emperor. Empires primarily fostered vertical links between subjects and the emperor, that is between the ruled and the ruler, rather than favoring horizontal ties that bring together regions, unite competing social sectors, or reconcile the elite groups dominant in each jurisdiction. In fact, a key strength of the Iberian empires was their ability to maintain a level of competition, antagonism, and even distrust among subjects. Competition and overlapping jurisdictions ensured that individual subjects and different sectors or institutions depended on the mediation and favor offered by the imperial administration and, ultimately, the king or queen.2 The documents collected in Volume I of Documenting Latin America show how Spain and Portugal extended their imperial power

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into the Americas and built institutions by combining European models with local indigenous customs and by drawing on the traditions established by Europeans, Africans, and missionary colonizers. Iberian imperial policies simultaneously favored and bolstered the dominance of wealthy European men while still providing the poor, non-Europeans, and women with some ways to protect and advance their interests. Particularly important to the state idea of the colonial period was the notion that the monarch was a compassionate, protective paternal figure who was concerned with the plight of all subjects living within the empire. If monarchies lost this legitimacy and subjects questioned their benevolence, European empires would lose much of their power and hold over Latin American populations.

Contradictory and coercive, the Iberian colonial states were also remarkably enduring. When they finally dissolved in the early nineteenth century, these massive European empires were replaced with (in most cases smaller) nation states. Benedict Anderson transformed the study of nations and nationalisms when he identified modern nations as imagined communities, a term still frequently used among scholars. Anderson asserted that all modern nations are communities because a critical mass of each nation’s members not only identify themselves with a particular territory or government, but they also possess a strong sense of belonging together due to shared language, customs, and values. This community, however, is imagined rather than real because all national territories are too large for members to all know each other directly, and because class, race, and gender divisions preclude a natural sense of unity. When scholars discuss modern nation states in any part of the world, they are referring to large (usually contiguous) territories governed by a central state, in which a significant or particularly powerful portion of the population is convinced that members of the territory form a single national community. The state system—clear leadership, laws, infrastructure, and monetary systems—is combined with the patriotic sentiment of the nation. In fact, nationalism often provided the state idea through which central government authorities sought to increase and legitimize their power. Though nations are part of modern history—the earliest date back to the late eighteenth century—they often claim to be ancient and to build on a long-standing and natural cultural identity. Yet the question of national culture is problematic, because all nations are made up of people of many different customs, religions, and even languages. Therefore, one must always ask: Whose culture becomes the national culture? How and why are other cultures excluded, and with what implications for the marginalized groups? The answer to these questions is often the story of interethnic and gender domination. In Latin America, race and gender divisions threatened to undermine nationalistic claims by revealing the exclusive nature of the state and enduring hierarchical social practices, which did not allow women and non-whites full membership in the nation state. The struggle to overcome interethnic and gender divisions in Latin America has been a long process that remains incomplete.

Identity and Power: Gender and Race, Subaltern and Elite

Every individual in the modern world is shaped by his or her race, gender, and relative economic and social power. These forces are so prominent that they often seem natural or straightforward, but they are, in fact, quite complicated. Even some scholars, for example, associate gender only with women, and race exclusively with peoples of non-European heritage. However, men as well as women live gendered lives, and peoples of European descent are influenced by their racial identities—albeit not in the same ways as non-Europeans. Moreover, although one can find consistencies in race and gender ideologies over time, the meaning given to these identities is both culturally specific and historically dynamic. In short, race and gender are constructed identities rather than biological categories.


Genetic studies make clear that biogenetically distinct races do not exist. Races are cultural inventions that respond to specific ideologies and historical circumstances (e.g., justifying conquest, coercing laborers, imposing religious conversion). In the most basic sense, race divides humans into distinct groups based on their supposed inherited physical and behavioral differences. Starting in the fifteenth century, Europeans and their American-born descendants developed a notion of race that reflected their attitudes and beliefs about the African, American, and Asian peoples they were encountering. Iberian colonizers typically believed that birth determined a person’s physical and intellectual characteristics; they even thought temperament derived from race. However, to establish an individual’s race, the state or those around an individual relied on cultural markers like religion, dress, occupation, place of birth, language, marriage partner, and the like. Thus, race functioned more like what one might call ethnicity today. Consequently, by changing or manipulating the emphasis within a combination of these characteristics a person’s race might change! By the time Latin American nations achieved independence, modern ideas about race as a biological category had begun to take shape, and peoples of European descent used these notions to identify some so-called races as inherently superior (European or “white”) or inferior (indigenous, African, and Asian). Such assertions were problematic in Latin American nation states, however, as the supposedly inferior peoples were also purportedly fellow members in the imagined community of the nation; in some cases these groups even accounted for the majority of the nation’s population. The historical figures and authorities presented in these volumes debated and deployed these markers of difference in a variety of ways, and one can trace how the significance of race developed over the course of time.

Gender functions similarly to race in the study of history, as it, too, is socially constructed and has been used to justify unequal power relations. Joan Scott developed a two-tiered definition of gender, which many historians continue to use as a foundation for gender analysis in the twenty-first century. Scott asserts that on one level gender is “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes.” This suggests that gender informs both relations between the sexes and also how individuals and societies make sense of assumed sexual differences. Many times, the supposedly inherent differences between men and women were (and are) socially structured—in other words, girls were taught to behave one way, boys another. By the time individuals reach maturity, these behaviors seem natural and timeless rather than learned. Scott’s definition of gender also has another important part to it. She argues that gender is “a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.” Here, she means that gender ideologies (assumptions about male and female qualities, or parental versus childlike qualities) can be manipulated by individuals and groups either to express power or try to increase their power over others. Gender functions this way in politics, and not only when women are involved. For example, when state officials use ideas about manliness to exclude certain adult men from political participation, they are using gender ideas to justify their actions. Gender, thus, encompasses ideas about how men and women are supposed to act, and it influences relationships, including political relationships, between individuals or groups.

Gender is, therefore, one of the essential building blocks of all societies and states, and understanding how gender functioned and changed over time is a crucial part of studying history. In Latin America, for example, colonial state officials identified indigenous peoples as niños con barbas (bearded children) who, although they might achieve physical maturity, were ostensibly perpetual children in other ways. This gendered racial notion justified the unequal power relations between colonizers and colonized peoples, although this state-sanctioned
interethic paternalism did not always work in practice as it was meant to in theory, as many chapters in Volume I show. Women continued to be excluded from politics after independence, but their marginalization held new meaning in the republican era. Denying women political rights helped to define the political nation as a male domain, and excluding women served to obfuscate class and race divisions between men in a given nation. Gender and race, therefore, upheld the politics of exclusion in Latin America just as they did in the United States and other parts of the world. And, just as in other societies, one can still find ways that these notions limit the rights and power of women and non-whites in contemporary Latin America.

Wealthy European men—the elite—benefited the most from gender and race ideologies, which helped them to rule over, exploit, and marginalize other groups. In many ways, elite is a clear-cut term that refers to those individuals or groups who dominate politics, the economy, and society. However, different kinds of elites existed, and it is important that one avoid the trap of thinking that elites were somehow uniform or homogenous. For example, members of the intellectual elite, whose ideas greatly influenced society and politics, were not necessarily the wealthiest men or those in political power. Different elite groups also competed with each other over economic and political power, and they often held divergent ideas about how society, the economy, and politics should be structured. Another potential division appeared between political and religious elites: In certain periods and locations, Church and state officials allied closely, whereas in other circumstances these two elite groups were at odds with each other. Even within the Church, deep divisions surfaced between the regular clergy (who belonged to religious orders) and lay clergy (who ministered to the members of a diocese); in many instances, these different Church officials fought bitterly over the jurisdiction of particular populations. Sometimes elite factions even made alliances (usually brief) with less-powerful peoples in order to beat a competing elite faction.

At the other end of identity and power politics, one finds subaltern peoples. Although a sophisticated field of subaltern studies exists, in these volumes the term subaltern refers simply to those groups that were outside of the dominant power structure. Most obviously, subalterns included indigenous peoples, Afro-Latin Americans, and peoples of mixed racial descent. However, it also included poor people of European descent and women across class and race lines. It is important to note that some individuals could be considered subaltern in some circumstances but part of the dominant power structure in others. Context mattered. An elite woman of European descent was part of the dominant race and class when considering her social status and power over non-Europeans, yet, throughout most of Latin American history, such a woman was excluded from political power and had limited rights to make decisions about the property she owned. Another example would be a male cacique (local indigenous leader) during the colonial period: in his case, he would be part of the political structure, at least at the local level, from which the elite woman was excluded. He also enjoyed privileges, exercised power over indigenous commoners, and could participate in commerce. But he was still subaltern, because he was excluded from the higher ranks of political power, and there were ways that his status was lower than Spanish men of lesser wealth. In cases like these, whether an individual would be considered subaltern or part of the dominant group depended on the nature of one's historical inquiry. The topic being explored, the forms of sociopolitical power under scrutiny, and the broad questions one is trying to answer, for example, determine which groups should be included in the category of subaltern or elite with any given chapters of this documentary history. Furthermore, subaltern groups or individuals did not necessarily share the same problems or goals, and

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they sometimes clashed and competed with each other. In the short term, an individual might improve his or her life through such contests, but in the long term competition among subalterns usually served to keep wealthy European men in power.

All of these terms refer to fluid categories and processes in history. They are complex rather than simple and historically adaptable rather than unchanging. All of the terms also focus on individuals’ and groups’ relative positions with regard to power. Instead of thinking of power as absolute or as something that one holds, it is more useful—and more historically accurate—to think of power as something that one exercises. This distinction is important because it indicates that even though subalterns were (and are) excluded from most formal positions of power, they might still exercise power in significant ways, particularly in an informal or local-level capacity. Power exists in a continuum, with different individuals and groups enjoying different kinds and levels of authority. Chapters in Documenting Latin America reveal myriad ways that wealthy European men wielded tremendous power and manipulated gender and race ideas to maintain inequalities. At the same time, many chapters allow readers to explore the numerous and sometimes surprising ways that women and peoples of indigenous or African descent manipulated ideologies that were meant to subordinate them in order to advance their personal or collective interests. These tensions, contradictions, and negotiations over gender, race, and politics were driving forces that moved Latin American history forward; they continue to shape the region today.

Getting the Most Out of Primary-Source Documents

Working with primary sources makes history both exciting and daunting. In the chapters to follow, readers can dive into the archives of Latin America’s past alongside the historians whose work it is to make sense of what are sometimes confusing or conflicting accounts. The primary sources in Documenting Latin America offer unparalleled perspectives on the views and lives of men and women who witnessed or created key moments in Latin American history; nothing gives readers a truer and more in-depth understanding of the past. Making history is really a process of giving meaning to the written and visual remains of the past. This book requires readers to evaluate the past and draw their own conclusions, maybe even to question or challenge the editors’ or contributing scholars’ views of the past.

Primary sources include almost any materials that capture the memories and thoughts of people who lived through particular events or periods in the past. In these two volumes on Latin American history, readers encounter transcriptions of ships’ logs, legal codes, scholarly essays, lists of possessions from wills, testimonial life accounts, portraits, and interrogations from court cases. Each source holds within it useful insights and potential pitfalls; the trick is to extract those insights while avoiding many of the pitfalls. Historians typically employ an array of strategies to recognize what the content of these sources means. A basic strategy is to ask oneself: Who created this source, under what circumstances, for what audience, and with what objective in mind? It is also imperative to consider whose voice, or what combination of voices, one “hears” while reading a document or viewing an image. A written source, or even a visual one, may contain input from one or more creators, speaking for themselves or on behalf of others. It is critical to determine this voice and authorship as accurately as possible. These volumes also present readers with information about people marginalized within Latin American society, many of whom were illiterate. Their thoughts and actions may be hidden within the words, impressions, or descriptions expressed by others, providing readers only indirect access to the voices of the marginalized. This raises questions about an author’s viewpoint that may be distorting any given document. Such distortions within a source do not mean that one must discount everything one reads; instead, the challenge is to figure out how an author’s perspective affects what a reader gleans from a particular document. A good technique for doing this is to question: What other perspectives might there be on an issue or event being presented in this document? It is critical to read
documents or images “against the grain” or “between the lines” to discern and analyze the author’s perspective, or to learn something that the author might have been hiding or ignoring. Implementing these methods, as well as others learned in class or on one’s own while working with the materials, enables readers to develop their own ways of engaging with Latin American history and sources.

Questions to Ask When Interrogating a Primary Source

1. What type of source is this?
2. What is known about who created it, when, and where?
3. Whom did the author consider the audience for this piece?
4. What views or perspectives were presented? Were other views silenced or challenged?
5. Is there evidence of distortion in the document? How might this be explained?
6. What can the source tell a reader about an event or period in history? What are the limits to what it can reveal?
7. How does this source fit into a bigger historical picture or period? Does it challenge a bigger picture or narrative in any way?

Volume I: Empires and Their Subjects

Volume I of Documenting Latin America allows readers to explore how Latin American empires and societies appeared and changed from the European invasions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the independence period of the early nineteenth century. Conquests in the Americas, the enslavement of Africans, and colonization coincided with the period during which Western Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, experienced the Renaissance, and created the mechanisms and institutions of early modern states and empires. In this period, European monarchies created mechanisms like councils of state and viceroys to govern overseas territories; they established trade monopolies and fleets to engage in global trade; and they extended the reach of royal courts and the inquisition to regulate subjects’ activities and thoughts. In short, they made modern states and empires possible.

Unprecedented European expansion and the globalization of trade and human movement created new ways of interacting and organizing life, often with a unique set of peoples. Monarchs, nobles, bureaucrats, priests, and commoners of Europe, Africa, and the Americas came together—often through violence, always through negotiation of some sort, and occasionally through cooperation—to form the impressive and wealthy Spanish and Portuguese Empires and their diverse and numerous subjects in the Americas. These new American empires grew out of European practices of conquest and governance combined with Amerindian traditions of empire building; both Europeans and Amerindians contributed notions of subjects’ rights and obligations. For example, indigenous ideas of reciprocity between the rulers and the ruled melded with European beliefs of a monarch’s paternalistic protection and lenience. In the Americas, Spain and Portugal created systems of royal courts that all residents could access and through which some received special protection and rights (e.g., communal lands).

Empires had existed in the Americas prior to the arrival of Europeans. In fact, the relatively young Inca and Aztec Empires had been extending imperial control over new regions, independent ethnic groups, and important resources right up to the invasion. The Mayan polities had declined some time earlier. But in all three cases, and in a few other similar regions, the existence of dense populations of sedentary agriculturalists ruled indirectly by ethnically dissimilar leaders paved the way for the Spanish to impose their domination and meld their practices and institutions with the earlier Amerindian ways. Amerindian history also mattered tremendously for Portugal’s colony in Brazil. Along the coast, the Portuguese found that the semisedentary Tupi-Namba organized into tribal societies could be engaged in trade and later forced to work on early sugar mills. In every part of the Americas

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8“Early modern” refers to the period between the Middle Ages and the French Revolution (1789).
that the Spanish and the Portuguese turned to, the diversity of Amerindian society shaped the fundamental nature of the colonies established there. Not only were colonies made possible and profitable by the indigenous inhabitants, the Aztec and Inca Empires could not have been defeated without the internal diversity and politics of indigenous societies that produced people willing to ally with outsiders to defeat overlords.

Christopher Columbus, and the conquering soldiers in Mexico, offer examples of the conquistador’s mindset; they also reveal the central role that indigenous allies played in early European victories, setting in motion the arrival of more Europeans and guaranteeing that ethnic groups would not all experience colonialism in the same way. In addition, not all Europeans were white, and not all conquests were successful. Afro-Iberians working as sailors, soldiers, and traders help explain the early importance of the African Diaspora to Iberian colonialism. The black anti-conquistador represented another result of the Diaspora, and Church and state authorities found they needed to negotiate and compromise with those they could not fully conquer, contain, or convert. Fluidity and flexibility characterized conquest society in the sixteenth century.

Mexico and the Andes offered populous and well-organized societies and rich mineral deposits. Consequently, these regions became the core of Spain’s American empire at least until the eighteenth-century rise in economic and demographic importance of plantation colonies in other parts of South America and the Caribbean. In Brazil, no silver or gold deposits motivated efforts to control the workforce to guarantee mining production, at least not until gold and diamonds were found in the late colonial period; however, despite high levels of indigenous mortality and escape, the colonists used indigenous labor in northwestern Brazil’s cane fields and mills until they accumulated the resources to import Africans as enslaved laborers.

The colonial economies survived the disruptions of warfare and the ongoing toll that disease took on indigenous populations, and they became centered on mining and plantations. These colonial economies eventually created extensive networks of trade and commercial activity, reaching all levels of society and almost every village and town. The creation of the capital to invest in commerce and the demand for laborers also promoted a spectacular expansion of the slave trade in African peoples, and this trade grew in size and importance with each century. The African Diaspora and the creation of new multiethnic societies and networks of administration and evangelization endowed the Americas with new kinds of people, new kinds of beliefs and religious practices, and many institutions and strategies of rule that bound the system together and gave mature Iberian colonialism the flexibility to last for centuries until Spain and Portugal lost their hold over the American territories in the nineteenth century.

Conquest and incorporation into imperial systems, thus, took place through interplay between European and indigenous actors. African peoples played a role, too, but they often faced the greatest challenges in shaping American societies. This volume offers various documents and voices that record the historical agency that people of all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds exercised in the world’s first era of globalization. Often these groups and individuals became visible in the historical record only when imperial states took real form. This happened when people faced judges in court, listened to and discussed the meaning of sermons, denounced their neighbors to Church investigators, recorded marriage in a parish book, dictated a will, or engaged in any of the other hundreds of ways of taking official or legal action.

Within colonial societies in the Americas, no one group was homogeneous, including the Europeans. For example, regional loyalties, social status, ethnic allegiance, institutional infighting, competition, and greed divided people in the colonies. The multiple and competing interests helped ensure that the functioning of colonial governance and the lives of subjects within the empire were not solely top-down processes. Documenting Latin America collects the kinds of court cases, petitions to authorities, and claims to rights that make the reality of subjects’ negotiations abundantly clear.

Economic and cultural activities also expose the fact that indigenous and African peoples, alongside elite and plebeian Europeans, generated the wealth and values that built and sustained European power during this era. Notaries’ records, litigation over
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property, and regulations of local marketplaces show how real people experienced colonialism, survived, and adapted. They also wrote poems and created visual art addressing these themes, and those sources are included in this volume as well. The interconnected colonial economy and the multiethnic cities it spawned were built from both above and below with participation at many levels. In fact, market participation and the growth of cities and towns marched forward in tandem with the creation of new kinds of societies, religious beliefs, and people of mixed ethnic heritage. Diversity and contradiction became hallmarks of mature colonial society during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

How Iberians governed amidst diversity and contradictions remains one of the key questions motivating scholarly investigation and debate. Colonial hegemony remains one of the best ways to understand how Iberian domination secured a measure of consent by those at the bottom and the middle. Spanish and Portuguese colonialism allowed opportunities for people of many different backgrounds to find ways of belonging to these empires, although never as equals to Europeans. In particular, the colonized embraced Catholicism and the advantages Catholic institutions offered; many cases included in the volume demonstrate how common Catholic participation became. The construction of these colonial cultural identities and religious allegiances also made rebellion rare. Much more common were various forms of adaptive resistance, which allowed individuals and colonized groups to accept some change and make concessions in order to resist total transformation or specific, hated colonial impositions. People either changed in order to remain who they were, or they created new blended beliefs or rituals that combined elements from more than one tradition.

These arrangements between rulers and the ruled also broke down when the levels of domination rose, the processes of mediating conflict faltered, or when significant crises weakened the state at the center. Each of these occurred in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Increasing in intensity and frequency from the late 1700s forward, these disruptions to the “way things worked” under Iberian colonialism led to changing forms of resistance, rebellion, and consciousness. Eventually, at different points in time groups at all levels of colonial Spanish American society questioned colonial rule, and many fought to end it. They often clashed with each other over the alternatives to European domination. Smashing Iberia’s American empires and colonial hegemony did not easily lead to national unity.

Spanish and Portuguese imperial archives are replete with remains of the elaborate Iberian bureaucracy, and colonized people’s active and sustained engagement with it. Similarly, the national, regional, and local archives are crowded with a multitude of documents and wonderful, heartbreaking, and simply confusing stories about Latin America’s colonial past. Historians, other scholars, and activists all mine these repositories for a glimpse of the past. In Documenting Latin America, readers dive into these collections to learn more about imperial aspirations and the limits of colonial domination. This process of domination and co-option not only helped establish the norms of colonial rule into the seventeenth century and beyond, but it also gave indigenous people a place in the Church, Brazilian slaves a forum for leadership, and non-Europeans—often women—additional tools to promote and protect their interests. Indians and women were well aware of their subordinated status in colonial society, but life in cities and towns afforded them opportunities to secure niches in an expanding economic system and even to parlay their knowledge of selling or healing to earn a living. A few women—both indigenous and Iberian—flaunted the norms barring women from public discourse, soldiering, or exercising political office. Colonial society became rich in its complexity and in the ways people found identity as subjects within empires ruled from a remote imperial center.

The age of reform following the eighteenth-century ascension of the Bourbon Dynasty to the Spanish and Portuguese thrones ushered in an era of unprecedented change in imperial rule. This period also coincided with the emergence of European creole and nativist identities and rising peasant and indigenous descent and revolt. Creole elites often feared both the upward mobility of social sectors normally relegated to inferior positions and work within society and a loss of privileges due to reforms from European rulers. Clergy worried of the fraying bonds of rural populations’ loyalties. Certainly
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resistance to higher taxes and outright rural insurrec-
tions throughout the eighteenth century proved that
many of these concerns were well founded. In fact,
when full-scale revolts broke out and hardened into
independence movements from the 1780s into the
1820s, creole patriots, parish priests, and indigenous
officials—all supposedly beholden to the colonial
state—figured prominently among those fighting
hardest to tear down the imperial system. In both
Spanish America and Brazil, formal independence
did not guarantee equality and full citizenship for all:
Indians, women, and Afro-Latin Americans, in partic-
ular, still faced systematic exclusion. Latin America’s
diverse, multiethnic societies, with both mechanisms
of inclusion and exclusion and negotiation and coer-
cion, would continue and would continue to change
well into the modern era of the nineteenth and
twentieth centuries.
DOCUMENTING LATIN AMERICA

Gender, Race, and Empire