Wars of Independence in the Caribbean and Latin America
Colonial Latin America: Politics and Economy

- Spain and Portugal: kings rule as absolute monarchs
- In Spanish colonies in the New World, the Viceroy and other administrators are appointed by the king
- Feudalism: a small class of large landowners enjoy extensive powers on their estates (haciendas/ fazendas)
- In Spanish colonies, landlords were granted encomiendas, then (after 1542) repartimientos over peasants
- Plantation agriculture, ranches and mining form the backbone of the colonial economy
- Many plantations specialized in producing cash crops like sugar, rice, tobacco, coffee, cotton, and bananas; slave labor was used extensively on these plantations
Colonial Spanish Society

- **Class**
  1. Upper class: *peninsulares* (nobles, natives of Spain)
  2. Middle class: *criollos/creoles* (Americans of European descent)
  3. *Mestizos*: mixed blood: European and Native American (i.e., Indian) ancestry
  4. *Mulattoes*: mixed European and African ancestry
  5. African slaves
  6. Native Americans

- **Race**
  1. White was considered good, dark bad
  2. But more of a spectrum from light to dark than a simple white/black distinction
Colonial Culture and Religion

- Dominance of the Roman Catholic Church (the official, state-sponsored religion)
- Persistence of native traditions
The Wars of Independence in Latin America (1804-1824)

Causes:
1. *Criollo* dissatisfaction: passed over for the best government jobs and squeezed for the greatest possible revenue by the colonial government
2. Enlightenment Ideas: they spread to Latin America as well as to North America
3. European distractions: the Napoleonic Wars and the subsequent efforts made to restore monarchs to their thrones divert attention and resources away from Latin America
4. Examples of successful revolutions in North America and France
First major revolt: Haiti (aka St. Domingue) (1791-1804)

- Very prosperous French colony in the Caribbean
- Economy was based on sugar and coffee plantations, most of which depended on slave labor
- Slave revolt occurs in 1791, shortly after the French Revolution began
- Rebels are led by Toussaint L’Ouverture (+1803), a former slave, then by General Dessalines
- French forces are led by General Leclerc, then by the Viscount Rochambeau; they are defeated
- Haiti is the first Latin American country to win independence (1804)
Other revolts occur in the 1810s and early 1820s

-Northern South America (Colombia, e.g.): Revolts are led by Simon Bolivar

-Southern South America (Chile, e.g.): revolts are led by Jose de San Martin and Bernardo O’Higgins

-Mexico: Revolts are led by Padre Miguel Hidalgo (+1811) and General Agustin de Iturbide (see the Cry of Dolores, 16 Sept 1810, for the start of the Mexican revolt)


-Brazil: declares independence from Portugal under Dom Pedro I in 1822
Consequences:
1. Republican governments in Latin America: Triumph of Enlightenment Ideology
2. End of significant European colonial empires in the Americas
3. The British navy plays a significant role in protecting the fledgling Latin American republics from Spanish and Portuguese attempts to recapture them; British commercial interests also become heavily involved in Latin America
4. The U.S., in the **Monroe Doctrine** (1823), tells European powers that it will not allow any European nation to try to reimpose its control over any former colonies that are now independent
Simon Bolivar, the Liberator (1783-1830)

- Born in Caracas to noble parents; thus Bolivar was a Creole
- Orphaned at age 9, he is raised by his uncle Don Carlos
- At age 15, he is sent to Spain to continue his education
- There he became thoroughly conversant with the works of Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau
-- He lost faith with Napoleon after witnessing the latter’s coronation as French emperor in 1804
- Served under Francisco de Miranda (“the Precursor”), a Venezuelan revolutionary, in 1822; Miranda was subsequently captured by the Spanish and dies in prison (1816)
- Cartagena Manifesto and takeover of Venezuela (1813)
- Exile to Jamaica (1815) and his famous Letter from Jamaica (1815) (Bolivar’s statement of principles)
- In 1819 he helped create the short-lived Republic of Great Colombia (La Gran Colombia)
Bolivar continued

-La Gran Colombia is plagued by squabbling between those who favor a more federal system (and thus greater decentralization of power) and those who, like Bolivar, want a stronger presidency and more centralization

-Guayaquil Meeting (with Jose de San Martin, Chile’s liberator), on July 26, 1822

-Bolivar and Sucre free Peru from Spanish control (1824) after the battle of Ayacucho

-Bolivar is forced to resign the presidency of La Gran Colombia in 1828; disillusioned, he dies in 1830

-On Bolivar’s last days, see Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novel, The General in His Labyrinth
Meeting of Bolivar and San Martin at Guayaquil
Rise of authoritarian governments

-La Gran Colombia falls apart in 1830-1831
-Jose Antonio Paez assumes control of Venezuela in 1830

-Caudillos (=strongmen, dictators) take over elsewhere (e.g., Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina (1829-1852), Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna (1829-1855) in Mexico, and Rafael Carrera (1839-1865) in Guatemala

-One of the biggest problems in the newly-freed colonies: the lack of previous governmental experience, which greatly hinders Latin American efforts at self-government (see Bolivar’s Letter from Jamaica, which is almost clairvoyant in predicting this problem)

-Another problem: the rule of local landed elites which benefits the peasant masses very little