



Map 6. Latin America in 1830

The Onset of the Wars for Independence

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By 1800, the Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Americas had been in place for three centuries—and were straining to survive. Latecomers to empire-building in the Americas, the French and English had carved out their own colonies largely in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The English “creoles” on the coast of the North American mainland, dissatisfied and disillusioned with British rule, had successfully rebelled in the 1770s, and the United States became the first American colony to achieve independence. African and African-American slaves on the Caribbean island of Saint-Domingue would rise up in the 1790s and seize their independence from the French. In 1804, Haiti became the second independent nation in the New World. The Spanish and Portuguese colonies moved more slowly and cautiously toward their break with the Iberian monarchies. In Spanish America, the revolts were many and varied, and in some cases, unsuccessful. In Portuguese America, the revolt could hardly be called a “war” given its brevity and lack of bloodshed. When surveying the wars for independence in Latin America, however, one should always keep in mind that these wars formed part of a larger series of rebellions leading to the independence of some twenty new nations across all of the Americas between 1776 and 1836—and the failure of other colonies and regions to achieve their independence.

CREOLES AND PENINSULIARES

In Spanish America, a growing division had emerged among those at the top of the social hierarchy, between creoles and *peninsulares*. In the words

of the great scientist Alexander von Humboldt, who traveled throughout Spanish America in the early nineteenth century. "The lowest, least educated and uncultivated European believes himself superior to the white born in the New World." A sense of creole identity had begun to emerge in Spanish America by the mid-seventeenth century (and to a lesser extent the same process was emerging more slowly in late eighteenth-century Brazil). Much like their English counterparts in North America, the creoles increasingly saw themselves as the best judges of how to rule the colonies. After centuries of experience and deep knowledge of local conditions, they resented the condescending cultural and social attitudes of *peninsulares* who (fresh off the boat) wanted to tell them what was best for their homeland. By 1800, the term "we Americans" and "our America" became frequent among the creole leadership. By the end of the eighteenth century, these creoles began to challenge the Spanish Empire just as the English "creoles" had challenged Great Britain.

Already in the mid-seventeenth century, vibrant regional elites had emerged, especially in Mexico and Peru, and they modeled the viceregal courts and social life to imitate the royal court in Madrid. Although the literature, art, and theater in these centers imitated that of Spain, they had already begun to take on an American flavor. A small group of white European elites living in a sea of indigenous, African, and racially-mixed peoples produced a high culture that was an increasingly American—a creole—version of Iberian culture. The blatant disdain *peninsulares* often showed for creoles, and the discrimination creoles suffered at the hands of the *peninsulares*, reinforced a growing sense of local pride. By 1800, these Americans had begun to produce literature and history that revealed in the unique features of their "country" or *patria*, as they often called their locale or region. Some historians would argue that a new sense of Americanism played a greater role in the move to independence than the ideas of the Enlightenment. By 1800, many of the Spanish in the New World had begun to see themselves as Mexicans, or Peruvians, or Chileans. (A similar process was taking place, but much more slowly, in Brazil.)

The Spanish American empire was older, richer, and more populous than the empires of the Portuguese, British, French, or Dutch. Columbus had arrived in the Caribbean in the 1490s, and by the 1530s the Spanish had conquered Mexico and Peru. By the 1570s, Spain had imposed imperial structures in the core regions: central Mexico, Peru, and the Caribbean. In Brazil, the core region around Bahia on the northeastern coast did not emerge until about 1600, and the core region in the southeast (Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro) would not emerge until the mid-1700s. The Spanish core colonies had been evolving for about a century before the English established a foothold on the eastern coast of North America and

far more populous than British North America. In 1500, there may have been some 75 to 80 million people in the Americas, about the size of the population of all of Europe. Even after the demographic catastrophe caused by conquest and disease, the indigenous population of Spanish and Portuguese America in 1800 was probably about 14 to 15 million (the population of Spain was about 12 million). Nearly half of the Spanish Americans lived in Mexico (or, more precisely, New Spain). After centuries of the slave trade, some 1 to 2 million people of African descent lived and worked in the Spanish colonies. About 3 to 4 million people were classified as racially mixed, known generically as *castas* or *castes*. "Whites" or Europeans probably numbered about 3 million and only about 40,000 of them were *peninsulares*. These numbers and percentages varied from region to region. In Mexico, Central America, and the Andes, Indians formed a large majority of the population. Blacks and mulattoes were the single largest group in the Spanish Caribbean and Brazil.

The Spanish American colonies were also the richest in the Americas, and would remain so for nearly 300 years. The silver mines of northern Mexico and what is now Bolivia (Upper Peru) supplied most of the precious metals in Europe, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The colonies were also rich exporters of sugar, tobacco, chocolate, dyes, leather, and other goods to Europe. Imagine the tobacco wealth of Virginia and multiply it, while adding in silver and a much larger traffic in slaves, and you have a sense of the wealth of colonial Spanish America. (The gold and diamond boom in eighteenth-century Brazil made it the engine of the Portuguese global empire, and also a hugely rich colony.) Spain's and Portugal's colonies in the Americas were the core of their global empires while the Thirteen Colonies were a less significant and smaller piece of Britain's truly global empire. While the English scrambled in the 1760s to find ways to tax the Americans to pay for the costs of their empire, Spain and Portugal extracted enormous profits from their American colonies. In Mexico alone, royal income rose by a factor of five in the eighteenth century, and nearly half this income was pure profit, after paying the costs of administration and defense.

THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

The first successful war for independence in Latin America took place not in Spanish or Portuguese colonies, but in the tiny French possession of Saint-Domingue. The Haitian Revolution was the bloodiest struggle in the "age of revolution" in the Americas, and it was the only successful slave rebellion in the history of the New World. As a social revolution in a Franco-American colony, the Haitian Revolution is unlike any of the other

it became a polarizing symbol for those who might contemplate colonial rebellion. It demonstrated to would-be rebels that colonial uprisings against the European metropolis could succeed, while also confirming the darkest nightmares of those would-be rebels about the dangers of unleashing the wrath of the lower classes. For creole leaders throughout Latin America, the Haitian uprising served as a cautionary tale. A war of creole elites against peninsular elites could easily lead to race or class warfare that might consume the creoles in the process. To use the imagery preferred by Bolívar, the creoles would be riding a tiger, and they could not afford to fall off. As would be the case in Spanish and Portuguese America in 1807–8, it was events in Europe, and more specifically, the French Revolution, that triggered war in Saint-Domingue and, eventually, led to the independence of France's most profitable overseas colony.

Haiti today occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola, the original staging ground for the Spanish conquest in Latin America. Columbus himself had founded Santo Domingo on the eastern end of the island in 1493, but the Spanish had neglected the western end of Hispaniola. In the seventeenth century, French buccaneers (*boucaniers*) began to operate from coastal enclaves and by the end of the century (1697), Louis XIV had compelled Spain to recognize French control of what became known as Saint-Domingue. Hispaniola, like many other islands in the Caribbean, was drawn into the booming sugar plantation economy in the seventeenth century. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Barbados and Jamaica (now under English control) had become major sugar plantation centers. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Saint-Domingue had eclipsed all the colonies in the Caribbean to become the world's great sugar plantation center, exporting more than 100 million pounds of sugar to Europe each year.

As with all the other great plantation colonies in the Americas, the French sugar plantations swallowed up tens of thousands of African slaves. In the late eighteenth century, more than 30,000 African slaves flowed into Saint-Domingue every year, making the colony one of the most Africanized societies in all the Americas. In the late 1780s, the colony's population consisted of about 25,000 whites (mainly French), about 20,000 mulattoes (*gens de couleur*), and more than 400,000 slaves, most of them African or the children of Africans. Slaves formed not only a majority of the colony's population, they accounted for 90 percent of Saint-Domingue's inhabitants! Most of the slaves came from Angola or Congo and while they worked primarily on sugar plantations, the colony also produced cotton, coffee, and indigo for export. Saint-Domingue alone accounted for one-third of all of France's foreign trade. By the late 1780s, Saint-Domingue was a plantation society built on the brutal repression of hundreds of thousands of slaves by less than 50,000 whites and mulattoes, a repression that produced enormous profits for the white planters and French traders.

The enormous concentration of Africans, and the seemingly ceaseless influx of new African slaves, created a powerful blending of African cultures with French Catholic touches. A new language (Creole) spoken by the masses emerged that blended African and French linguistic patterns. By the eighteenth century, vodun had emerged as a potent underground religion among the slaves. A mix of rites and symbols that originated in Africa, it was an animistic religion (like *candomblé* in Brazil) built around the invocation of a series of deities. The faithful attempted to influence the course of events through appeals to these deities. Some of the most serious resistance to the slave regime came from vodun priests. Runaway slaves (known as *maroons* in English) established communities deep in the hills and forests of the interior of the island. In 1758, a substantial rebellion led by François Macandal (a charismatic maroon leader) failed and he was brutally executed, although adherents of vodun believed that he turned himself into a flying bug and escaped the executioner at the last minute. (The legendary Cuban writer, Alejo Carpentier, recreates this episode in his evocative novel, *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*), 1949.)

As in Spanish America, it would be divisions among the elites that opened up the possibility of lower-class uprisings and unleashed the masses. Social and ethnic gradations divided the white and mulatto populations in Saint-Domingue. Among the whites, the French-born looked down on the whites born in the Americas (much like the creole-*peninsular* split in Spanish America). The so-called *grand blancs* dominated the island society and the *petits blancs* powerfully resented their treatment by their French-born compatriots. Much of the mulatto population aspired to success in French society, learning the language, adopting Catholicism, and assimilating to French customs and dress. They often became the intermediaries between white and slave society, serving as the agents of repression, yet the whites looked down upon the *gens de couleur*.

When the revolution broke out in France in 1789, and French revolutionaries published the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, it did not take long for the *gens de couleur* in Saint-Domingue to assert their rights to full citizenship. (Virtually no one, of course, considered slaves as worthy of the rights of citizenship.) When the *gens de couleur* read the classic phrase from the Declaration that "men are born and remain free and equal in rights," they took these powerful words to heart. The new National Assembly in France created positions for six representatives from Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, making France the first European colonial power to extend representation to colonials. As factionalism and civil war convulsed France, so in the island colony, various factions of the free population began to fight for control of Saint-Domingue. Most wanted some form of autonomy from France, and wanted to maintain the slave system. Most whites refused to accept the mulattoes as equal citizens

and, in fact, whites were angered by moves in France to enfranchise some mulattoes. Disillusioned mulattoes planned an uprising that was uncovered in 1790. The leaders were quickly executed.

Amidst this increasingly bloody infighting among the 50,000 free inhabitants of the colony, the slave population did not sit idly by: indeed, they plotted an uprising of their own for months. Led by the vodun high priest (*papalou*) Boukman, thousands of slaves rose up simultaneously around Le Cap Français, sweeping across the North Plain burning plantations, killing whites, and plundering. Boukman would soon die in the revolt, but it spread like wildfire through the colony as tens of thousands of slaves joined the rebellion and thousands of whites died at their hands. The lucky ones fled to neighboring colonies and to the United States.

Over the next decade, Saint-Domingue became one of the bloodiest battlegrounds in the history of the Americas. French, English, and Spanish armies invaded and occupied on multiple occasions as the island became a theater for struggles among European powers. Tens of thousands of European troops died, mostly of malaria and yellow fever, an ironic reversal of the demographic catastrophe that ravaged Native Americans on the island in the sixteenth century. In June 1793, the French revolutionary commission led by L'Éger Sonthonax abolished slavery in Saint-Domingue (the first decree to abolish slavery anywhere in the Americas). Meanwhile, the fighting spread to the surrounding French and British islands in the Caribbean as slave rebellions and invading European armies moved from colony to colony.

Out of the midst of shifting alliances and loyalties among different groups arose one of the greatest figures of the age of revolution in the Americas: François Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture (eventually known simply as Toussaint Louverture), born in 1743. An American-born slave, he eventually became a slave steward, a key position in the plantation hierarchy. Literate in French and conversant with Catholicism, he was very similar to the *gens de couleur* whose ranks he joined when freed by his master. Toussaint was a complex figure. He brilliantly shifted alliances and loyalties for several years among many groups that fought for control of the revolution and the island, and rather than fighting for independence from France, he sought to become the governor of the French colony of former slaves. Bloody struggles ensued between rival black military leaders and their followers. With the help of his two key lieutenants, Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1758–1806) and Henri Christophe (1767–1820), Toussaint took control of the colony and in 1801 invaded Spanish Santo Domingo on the eastern side of the island. They hoped to guarantee their work by controlling the entire island.

In the words of the great West Indian historian, C. L. R. James, "For nearly ten years the population, corrupt enough before, had been trained

in bloodshed and soaked in violence. Bands of marauders roamed the countryside. The only disciplined force was the army, and Toussaint instituted a military dictatorship." To revive the shattered economy, Toussaint failed in an attempt to reinstitute the old plantation system. Although a former slave himself, he failed to see that other former slaves no more wanted to work in the sugar fields as forced laborers than they did as slaves. During an interlude in warfare on the European continent, the new French Emperor Napoléon decided to regain control of the once-rich sugar colony, sending troops to the island in early 1802 under the command of his brother-in-law General Charles Leclerc. Within months, Leclerc reasserted French control, defeating Christophe and Dessalines, and then Toussaint. Leclerc then invited Toussaint to dinner, seized and shackled him, and sent him off to a French prison where he died in April 1803.

The ferocity of the French tactics (executing entire brigades of black troops, for example) forged an uneasy alliance between blacks and mulattoes. In what became a war of near total extermination, the French would fail to hold the island. Yellow fever (which killed General Leclerc), renewed war with the British across the Atlantic world, and the tenacity of the black and mulatto armies finally forced the French to withdraw in late 1803. On January 1, 1804, after nearly fifteen years of savage and bloody fighting, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and his fellow generals declared the independence of the new nation of Haiti (from an indigenous name for the island meaning "land of the mountains"). Ravaged, burned, and bloodied, the Haitians had succeeded in liberating more than 400,000 slaves, a third of whom had probably died in the conflict. Few whites remained on the island. Tragically, the Haitians would now face decades of dictatorship and repression under a series of leaders (black and mulatto) who fought among themselves for supreme control of the first independent nation in Latin America.

THE SEEDS OF REBELLION

As the British historian John Lynch has noted, the Spanish version of the Enlightenment shoved aside most of its philosophy and reduced it to a program of modernization. From the perspective of the king, this meant modernizing administration and the imperial economy: "To bring my royal revenues to their proper level," in the words of Charles III. In America, the Spanish Enlightenment was, according to Lynch, "little more than a programme of renewed imperialism." For Spanish Americans, the Enlightenment did not so much produce revolutionary sentiments as it generated a more critical attitude toward authority, tradition, and monarchy. Creoles began to rethink their relationship with the Spanish monarchy,

especially with the profoundly different approaches of the Bourbons after they succeeded the Hapsburgs at the beginning of the eighteenth century. As with the many different peoples in the other European colonies, they saw their first loyalty as being not to nation or to assemblies or governments, but to their king. This was an intensely direct and personal relationship in European societies dating back to the Middle Ages. When the Bourbons replaced the Hapsburgs, they instituted an important shift in the nature of the relationship between king and subjects. Bourbon monarchs and their advisors moved the empire toward a more bureaucratic and rational system and away from the more personalistic ethos of the Hapsburgs.

Many Spaniards and Spanish Americans also began to question the power and authority of the Catholic Church, the most important cultural institution in Spanish America. While the Enlightenment philosophers provided intellectual reasons to question the authority of the Church, increasingly royal authorities also challenged the authority of the Church for very practical political and economic motives. Enlightened monarchs and their counselors saw the Catholic Church as a powerful competitor to royal authority in their emerging nation-states and they chose to attack, weaken, and restrict the representatives and the power of the Church in Iberia and Ibero-America.

The radicalism of the French and American Revolutions also had a profound impact on the creoles. The Anglo-Americans in the United States showed that it was possible to challenge colonial rule—and win. They also provided a living, breathing example of a republic that worked. Although the French Revolution proved much too radical, democratic, and anarchic for most creoles, it did (again) provide a sophisticated and powerful political rationale for the ideals of liberalism and republicanism. Liberty, equality, republican government, representation, and free trade were attractive new ideals for the Latin American revolutionaries. As the liberator Francisco de Miranda said 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."

A trading revolution in the Atlantic world also had a powerful effect on the creoles. The so-called Seventeenth-Century Depression had ended in the first years of the eighteenth century, and all the European powers had dramatically expanded their transatlantic trading networks and volume. England led the way as it entered into the First Industrial Revolution in the second half of the eighteenth century. By 1750, creoles acutely felt the inability to trade with the English and the restrictions on trading within the empire. England had emerged by 1800 as the greatest maritime and commercial power in the world. The colonists wanted access to English goods and English markets, especially manufactured goods—in particular, textiles. Throughout the eighteenth century, the only means to

gain access was through smuggling, which had become a widespread and lucrative business, especially in those colonies away from colonial centers (primarily Venezuela and Argentina).

In 1800, the colonies had a larger population than Spain and produced more exports, but they were limited to trading with a few ports in Spain and the trade was heavily regulated and taxed. Under the mercantilist systems that many of the European empires followed, the metropolis attempted to control all trade within its domain and to exclude any outsiders. These colonial trading empires were not unlike the trading blocs that have emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Much more so than in English America, the Spanish system was highly bureaucratized, centralized, heavily taxed at every step, and funneled through a handful of ports in America and Spain. The ideological and economic shifts in the second half of the eighteenth century deeply affected the creole elites in Spanish and Portuguese America. In Spanish America, the Bourbons added to creole discontent with the reassertion of imperial control through their reforms. After 1750, the monarchy practiced open and systematic discrimination against creoles, believing them not to be as loyal to the interests of Madrid as *peninsulares*. Probably three of every four major imperial appointments in the Americas in the second half of the century went to *peninsulares*.

By 1750, Spanish American creoles were anxious to exert greater control over their homelands in the Americas. In most cases, the wars for independence would be driven forward by creole demands for greater autonomy and free trade. The words of Simón Bolívar, the greatest liberator in Latin America, vividly sum up creole discontent in 1815: "Americans today, and perhaps to a greater extent than ever before, who live within the Spanish system, occupy a position in society no better than that of serfs destined for labor." The parallels with the American Revolution and North American "creoles" are striking. This growing sense of "American-ness" reflected the long and steady growth of American populations, especially in the colonial centers.

The old Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru had subdivided, as population and economic activity had spread outward from the centers since their creation in the 1520s and 1530s. In addition to the extensive Mexico, New Spain included the Kingdom of Guatemala (that is, all of Central America), an area that already had regional elites and centers in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Northern South America had developed so greatly by the mid-eighteenth century that it had been spun off as a third viceroyalty (New Granada) and it had three developing regional centers: Venezuela, New Granada (Colombia), and Ecuador. The southern tier of the old Viceroyalty of Peru had also been spun off in the 1770s as a fourth Viceroyalty (La Plata) including modern-day

Paraguay, Argentina, and Bolivia. Chile, although still part of Peru, had its own well-developed regional elite by 1750 (and remained a part of the Viceroyalty of Peru).

While the discontent of colonial elites had grown dramatically by the beginning of the nineteenth century, unlike their U.S. counterparts, these elites had not forced the issues of political and economic autonomy to the breaking point. War in Europe broke the colonial bonds for them. The processes of modernization and reform set the stage for the wars for independence in Spanish America, but it was the Napoleonic wars in Europe, and more specifically, Napoleon's invasion of Spain, that triggered the wars. After 1799, Napoleon emerged as the strongman in France, and he led his armies across Europe until the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, deposing monarchs and dominating the entire continent. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte dominated Europe from the Atlantic to the borders of the Russian Empire. Unable to challenge British control of the seas (after his naval defeat at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 off the coast of Spain), he turned to the conquest of the last two continental European regions not under his control: Iberia and Russia. Although he quickly occupied Spain and Portugal, continual warfare in both countries sapped his armies for years. The occupation of Iberia did allow Napoleon to turn in 1812 to the invasion of Russia, where he would face defeat and the collapse of his European empire. Napoleon's control of Spain, and Britain's control of the seas, left the Spanish American colonies adrift and set off a chain reaction that led to the wars for independence. By 1826, all of Spain's colonies in the Americas (except Cuba and Puerto Rico) had broken away. Unlike Britain's North American colonies, which were a minor outpost of a world empire, the Spanish American colonies formed the core of Spain's once-mighty empire. Spain fought fiercely and futilely to retain what it could, with the bloodiest wars taking place in the richest colonial centers: Mexico and Peru.

The Spanish and Portuguese monarchies reacted in dramatically different ways to the Napoleonic invasions in 1807–8. The Portuguese had long been allies of the English and had been preparing for a possible French invasion for more than a decade. The Braganzas became the ruling family in Portugal in 1640, and Maria I had ascended to the throne in 1777. The Portuguese monarchy had become the richest in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century with the discovery of gold and diamonds in Brazil. Maria I married her uncle, Pedro III, and they ruled jointly until his death in 1786. After the executions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in France (1793), Maria became increasingly unstable, convincing herself that she would also die at the hands of a mob and that she would burn in Hell. Maria's son, João (John), began to rule Portugal and he was named Regent in 1799 after his mother was declared "incurably insane." He would rule in

her name until she died in 1816, when he would become João VI. His wife, Carlota Joaquina, was a daughter of Carlos IV of Spain.

When the French sent forces across Spain into Portugal in late 1807, the royal family chose to evacuate to Brazil under British escort. Portuguese ships had been ready in the Lisbon harbor for months, and they had been joined by British ships in mid-November. When João gave the order for the royal family to embark on November 24, chaos ensued as thousands of courtiers scrambled to secure a spot on the fleet amidst days of heavy rains. On November 27, the royal family assembled at the docks and the mad Maria had to be dragged kicking and screaming from her coach. By then, some 10,000 people had scrambled aboard the ships, many without their baggage. The fleet set sail only hours before French troops, under General Andoche Junot, swept into Lisbon on the morning of November 30. The monarchy would not return to Portugal for fourteen years!

Compared to the Spanish Bourbons, the Portuguese Braganzas appeared to be one big happy and wise royal family. The Spanish monarch, Carlos IV, had assumed the throne at the age of 40 in 1788 on the death of his father, Carlos III, the great Bourbon reformer. Not the most intelligent of men, Carlos IV loved hunting (every day) and was content to leave the affairs of state to the true power behind the throne, Manuel Godoy. Born in 1767 to a humble family, Godoy was serving as a royal bodyguard when in the 1780s he became the lover of Maria Luisa, the wife of Carlos, then the crown prince. Sixteen years older than Godoy, Maria Luisa had been a beauty in her youth, but became increasingly ugly with age (as the paintings of the great Spanish artist Francisco de Goya so brilliantly document). Described by one diplomat as a "passionate, unsatisfied woman bursting with ill-restrained desires," she suffered from several illnesses that wrecked her physically. Godoy's control over the queen was total and he became a duke, then secretary of state, and eventually a prince through her favors.

After French troops occupied Portugal, more moved into northern Spain, gradually edging closer to Madrid. Many blamed Godoy for the invasion and in a dramatic turn of events in March 1808, a mob ransacked Godoy's home, he was jailed, and the king chose to abdicate in favor of his son Fernando (who became Fernando VII). Numerous Spaniards, nobles and commoners, saw Fernando as their only hope of salvation from an inept monarchy and the encroachments of Napoleon. The wily Napoleon then "invited" Carlos and Fernando to visit him in southern France in April 1808. Napoleon announced to them that they must renounce the throne in the first days of May. He wrote to his foreign minister Talleyrand that Fernando was "very stupid" and "very wicked," that his father was "very nice," and that Maria Luisa had "her heart and her past on her face." On May 6, Fernando abdicated the throne, and his father signed a document handing Spain over

to Napoleon, who then placed his half-brother Joseph on the Spanish throne. (Carlos IV and Maria Luisa would die in exile in Italy in 1819.) The Spanish people, in one of the more heroic moments in the nation's history, would have nothing of it, and rose up in the cities and fields. They resisted the French occupation with tenacity and at enormous cost. The great uprisings of May 1808 initiated a six-year-long struggle to regain Spanish independence. Fierce fighting broke out across the peninsula. Goya's paintings of the May uprisings and his terrifying sketches (the *Disasters of War*) during these years are some of the greatest works in Western art.

Across the country and in the absence of the true king, citizens formed juntas to rule in the name of the imprisoned Fernando VII. Many of these juntas joined together to form a "supreme" central junta. When the French captured Seville in 1810, the junta became a Council of Regency ruling in the name of Fernando VII in Cádiz. In September 1812, the Council was transformed into a parliament, or *cortes*. In the absence of the crown, most of the royal court, and the nobility, the Cortes became a liberal body calling for the end of most of the privileges and rights of feudal society. In 1812, the Cortes produced Spain's first constitution. Across Spanish America, the colonists also formed juntas of self-governance. They were faced with a fundamental dilemma: how to react to the fall of the monarchy, the French occupation, and the end of all direct rule from Spain? For all intents and purposes, the colonists had political and economic autonomy dropped in their laps by the Napoleonic invasion, and the power of the British navy to keep the French from crossing the Atlantic. This was a pivotal shift, with the "people" ruling through the juntas, rather than the king ruling over his subjects. How were the elites to determine who had authority in the absence of direction from the monarch? What was the nature of authority when not blessed by royal will?

The momentous events in Spain triggered the wars for independence in Spanish America. A first set of wars broke out after 1808. Most colonists were reluctant to break with Spain and chose to remain loyal to Fernando, even in his absence. What is most striking about this initial crisis is how *few* chose to challenge the colonial system. Even creoles with deep resentments and grievances largely chose to remain loyal to Fernando and await his return. Some creoles did seize the opportunity of the moment, and called for independence from Spain. The rebellions that broke out were nearly all defeated, with the exception of those in Paraguay and Argentina. Ironically, the return of Fernando VII to power in 1814 would trigger a second set of wars for independence. Fernando disappointed many loyal colonists by attempting to return to the absolutist, colonial regime of the eighteenth century—a stupid and disastrous move on his part. The creoles had quickly become accustomed to self-rule,

trade with England, and greater control over their own regions. Combined with the great wounds and social divisions opened by the first set of wars, Fernando's rejection of constitutionalism and the Constitution of 1812 sparked the final collapse of Spain's once mighty empire in the Americas.