special authority in each of the five Iroquois nations was matrilineal. Women chose the men who served as each clan's delegates to the nation's council, and each nation, in turn, elected representatives to the confederation's fifty-member ruling body, the Council Fire. That council decided all issues affecting the confederation by consensus.

The Europeans who stumbled upon this kaleidoscope of Amerindian civilizations were themselves just emerging from a long period of backwardness. The Black Death had swept out of Russia in 1350, leaving 25 million dead. There followed a relentless onslaught of epidemics that so devastated the continent that its population declined by 60 to 75 percent in the span of a hundred years. So few peasants were left to work the land that feudal society disintegrated, the price of agricultural labor soared, and new classes of both rich peasants and poor nobles came into being. The sudden labor shortage spurred technical innovation as a way to increase production, and that innovation, in turn, led to the rise of factories in the cities. The social upheaval brought about a new mobility among the long-suffering peasantry, and with it a new aggressiveness. Rebellions by the starving poor against their feudal lords became more frequent. Some even assailed the all-powerful Catholic Church, whose bishops preached piety to the common man while surrounded by the privileges of the nobility.

By the fifteenth century, the frequency of plagues ebbed, population rebounded, and the continent emerged into a dazzling era of artistic and scientific achievement. The first printing presses disseminated the new knowledge widely, through books written in scores of vernacular languages, ending forever the monopoly of Latin and the stranglehold of the clergy on learning. In 1492, as Columbus launched Europe's historic encounter with the Amerindians, Renaissance geniuses like Hieronymus Bosch and Leonardo da Vinci were at the apex of their fame; the German master Albrecht Dürer was twenty-one; Niccolò Machiavelli was twenty-three; Dutchman Desiderius Erasmus was twenty-six; the English Thomas More was fourteen; Copernicus was only nineteen, and Martin Luther a boy of eight.

The revolutions in production and in knowledge were reflected in politics as well. For the first time, strong monarchs ruled England and Spain, kings who were determined to create unified nations out of feuding states that had squabbled and warred against each other since the fall of the Roman empire.

Foremost among those monarchs were King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile, who joined their twin kingdoms and finally ousted the Moors in 1492 from the Kingdom of Granada, the last Arab stronghold in Europe. For most of the previous eight centuries, Moors had occupied the Iberian Peninsula, where they withstood fierce but intermittent crusades by Christian Spaniards to reclaim their land. Those crusades—the Spanish call them La Reconquista—had succeeded over the centuries in slowly shutting the Moors farther south, until only Granada remained in Arab hands.

Ironically, the Moorish occupation and La Reconquista prepared Spain for its imperial role in America. The occupation turned the country and the city of Córdoba into the Western world's premier center for the study of science and philosophy, while the fighting engendered a hardened warrior ethos in the hidalgos, Spain's upper nobility. It was those hidalgos who later rushed to fill the ranks of the conquistador armies in the New World. The wars provided vital practice in colonization, with Spanish kings gradually adopting the practice of paying their warriors with grants from land they recovered in battle. Finally, La Reconquista reinforced a conviction among Spaniards that they were the true defenders of Catholicism.

Unlike Spain, which grew monolithic through La Reconquista, England emerged from the Middle Ages bedeviled by strife among its own people. The most bloody of those conflicts was the thirty-year Wars of the Roses, which finally drew to a close in 1485 when Henry Tudor of the House of Lancaster vanquished Richard III of the House of York. Henry VII quickly distinguished himself by creating a centralized government and reliable system of taxation, the first English monarch to do so. His success was due in no small measure to the prosperity of English farming, to the flowering of English nationalism, and to his enlightened concessions to local self-government. Henry's subjects proudly believed themselves to be better off than any people in Europe, and they were largely right, for neither the widespread class divisions nor the famine and squalor that afflicted much of the continent during the fifteenth century could be found in England. Slavery, for instance, did not exist in the kingdom, and English serfs already enjoyed greater liberties than their European counterparts. The yeomanry, small farmers who comprised a large middle class between the gentry and the serfs, fostered economic stability and provided a counterweight to curb the power of the nobility. At the same time, Parliament and the traditions of English common law accorded the average citizen greater protection from either the king or his nobles than any other political system in Europe.

Such were the conditions in 1497 when Henry, fired by news of Columbus's discoveries, dispatched explorer John Cabot to America. Cabot landed in Newfoundland and laid claim to North America for the British
Crown, but he perished in a subsequent trip before establishing a colony. That failure, along with the discovery of gold and silver in Mexico and Peru a few decades later, permitted Spain to establish its paramount power of sixteenth-century world power. Meanwhile, the English, bereft of colonies and increasingly consumed by religious and political strife at home, were reduced to sniping at Spanish grandeur through the exploits of their pirates. When they finally did embark on a New World empire a century later, the English brought with them not just their tradition of local self-government but the vestiges of their domestic conflicts as well. Most important of which were the religious schisms and sects that arose after Henry VIII broke with the pope in Rome and established the Church of England. Among those sects, one in particular, the Puritans, was destined to leave a vast imprint on American society.

Another “British” conflict that was to greatly influence the New World was the colonization of Catholic Ireland and the bloody repression that accompanied it. By their callous treatment of the Irish, Anglo-Norman Protestants set the stage for the massive Irish flight that followed. English leaders justified that occupation by claiming that the Irish were a barbarian people, but in doing so, they gave birth to notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority that they would later use to justify their conquest of Native Americans.

**EARLY SPANISH INFLUENCE IN THE UNITED STATES**

The textbooks most of us read in grammar school have long acknowledged that Spanish conquistadores crisscrossed and laid claim to much of the southern and western United States nearly a century before the first English colonies were founded at Jamestown and Massachusetts Bay. But most Anglo-American historians have promoted the view that the early Spanish presence rapidly disappeared and left a minor impact on U.S. culture when compared to our dominant Anglo-Saxon heritage.

Those early expeditions, however, led to permanent Spanish outposts throughout North America, to the founding of our earliest cities, Saint Augustine and Santa Fe, and to the naming of hundreds of U.S. rivers, mountains, towns, and even several states. Moreover, they led to a Spanish-speaking population—more accurately, a Latinomestizo population—that has existed continuously in certain regions of the United States since that time. That heritage, and the colonial society it spawned, has been so often overlooked in contemporary debates over culture, language, and immigration that we would do well to review its salient parts.

Juan Ponce de León was the first European to touch what is now U.S. soil. His fruitless search for the Fountain of Youth led to his discovery in 1513 of La Florida. He returned eight years later but was killed in battle with the Calusa Indians before he could found a settlement.

Nearly two decades after Ponce de León’s death, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado and Hernando de Soto, their imaginations fired by the treasures Cortés had seized in Mexico, each led major expeditions in search of the fabled cities of gold. Starting from central Mexico in 1539, Coronado and his men marched north into present-day Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, planting the Spanish flag wherever they went. By the time the expedition returned in 1542, the Spaniards had discovered the Grand Canyon, crossed and named many of the continent’s great rivers, but discovered no gold. The same year Coronado set out, De Soto led an expedition out of Cuba that explored much of Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana, but he and half his men perished without finding any treasure.

The most extraordinary exploit of all, however, was that of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, who arrived in Florida in 1527—fifteen years before De Soto—as second-in-command to Pánfilo de Narváez, the bungling onetime governor of Cuba whom King Charles of Spain authorized to complete the colonization of Florida. After landing on the peninsula’s western coast, Narváez led a three-hundred-man expedition inland near present-day Tallahassee, then foolishly lost touch with his ships and was killed. His men, unable to withstand the constant Indian attacks, headed west along the Gulf Coast on makeshift barges.

Only four survived the ordeal, among them Cabeza de Vaca and a Spanish Moor named Estevanico. The four spent the next seven years wandering through the North American wilderness. Their six-thousand-mile trek, one of the great exploration odysseys of history, and the first crossing of North America by Europeans, is preserved in a report Cabeza de Vaca wrote for the king of Spain in 1542. At first, they were separated and enslaved by coastal tribes, where Cabeza de Vaca was beaten so often his life became unbearable. After a year in captivity, he managed to escape and took up the life of a trader between the tribes: “Wherever I went, the Indians treated me honorably and gave me food, because they liked my commodities. I became well known; those who did not know me personally knew me by reputation and sought my acquaintance.”

His rudimentary medical knowledge enabled him at one point to cure some sick Indians. From that point on, the tribes revered him as a medicine man. Once a year, when the various tribes gathered for the annual
picking of prickly pears, he was reunited with his fellow Spaniards, who remained enslaved. At one such gathering in 1533, he engineered their escape and they all fled west through present-day Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. As they traveled, word spread of the wondrous white medicine man and his companions, and soon thousands of Indians started to follow in a caravan of worshipers. The four did not finally reconnect with Spanish civilization in northern Mexico until 1534. By then, Cabeza de Vaca had been transformed. He no longer regarded the Native American as a savage, for he now had an intimate understanding of their culture and outlook. Instead, the barbarity of his fellow Spaniards toward the Indians now filled him with despair. His description of his trip through an area where Spanish slave traders were hunting Indians remains a powerful revelation into the nature of the Conquest:

With heavy hearts we looked out over the lavishness watered, fertile, and beautiful land, now abandoned and burned and the people thin and weak, scattering or hiding in flight. Not having planted, they were reduced to eating roots and bark; and we shared their famine the whole way. Those who did receive us could provide hardly anything. They themselves looked as if they would willingly die. They brought us blankets they had concealed from the other Christians and told us how the latter had come through razing the towns and carrying off half the men and all the women and boys.10

THE TOLL OF CONQUEST

The devastation Cabeza de Vaca warned of still defies comprehension. By the late 1500s, a mere century after the Conquest began, scarcely 2 million natives remained in the entire hemisphere. An average of more than 1 million people perished annually for most of the sixteenth century, in what has been called “the greatest genocide in human history.”11 On the island of Hispaniola, which was inhabited by 1 million Taínos in 1492, less than 46,000 remained twenty years later.12 As historian Francis Jennings has noted, “The American land was more like a widow than a virgin. Europeans did not find a wilderness here; rather, however involuntarily, they made one.”

Fewer natives perished in the English colonies only because the Amerindian populations were sparser to begin with, yet the macabre percentages were no less grisly: 90 percent of the Indian population was gone within half a century of the Puritan landing on Plymouth Rock; the Block Island Indians plummeted from 1,500 to 51 between 1622 and 1774; the Wampanoag tribe of Martha’s Vineyard declined from 3,000 in 1642 to 513 in 1764; and the Susquehannock tribe in central Pennsylvania nearly disappeared, falling from 6,500 in 1647 to 250 by 1698.13

Much of this catastrophe was unavoidable. The Indians succumbed to smallpox, measles, tuberculosis, and bubonic plague, for which they had no immunity, just as Europeans had succumbed to their own epidemics in previous centuries. But an astounding number of native deaths resulted from direct massacres or enslavement. If the Spaniards exterminated more than the British or French, it is because they encountered civilizations with greater population, complexity, and wealth, societies that desperately resisted any attempt to subjugate them or seize their land and minerals.

The battle for Tenochtitlán, for instance, was rivaled in overall fatalities by few in modern history. During the eighty-day siege of the Aztec capital by Cortés and his Texcoco Indian allies, 240,000 natives perished.14 A few Indian accounts of the battle survive today only because of Franciscan missionaries like Bernardino de Sahagún and Diego de Durán, who as early as 1524 developed a written form of the Nahuatl language, the lingua franca of central Mexico. The missionaries urged the Indians to preserve their tragic songs and reminiscences of the Conquest, and several of those accounts, such as the following section from the Codex Florentino, vividly describe what happened at Tenochtitlán:

Once again the Spaniards started killing and a great many Indians died. The flight from the city began and with this the war came to an end. The people cried: “We have suffered enough! Let us leave the city! Let us go live on weeds!”

A few of the men were separated from the others. These men were the bravest and strongest warriors. The youths who served them were also told to stand apart. The Spaniards immediately branded them with hot irons, either on the cheek or the lips.15

Less than a quarter century after the arrival of Columbus, the Indian genocide sparked its first protest from a Spaniard, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, who had arrived in Santo Domingo as a landowner but opted instead to become a Franciscan missionary. The first priest ordained in America, he quickly relinquished his lands and launched a campaign against Indian enslavement that made him famous throughout Europe. As part of that campaign, he authored a series of polemics and defended the Indians in public debates against Spain’s greatest philosophers. The most famous of those polemics, A Short Account of the Destruction of the
Creeks resisted and the U.S. Army, led by Jackson, intervened. During the war's decisive battle at Horseshoe Bend, Alabama, on March 27, 1814, Jackson's men massacred and cut off the noses of 557 Creeks, then skinned the dead bodies to tan the Indian hides and make souvenir bridle reins.\textsuperscript{21}

**THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH**

While all European settlers justified the Indian conquest and genocide as God's will, the Spanish and English differed substantially in their methods of subjugation, and this eventually led to radically different colonial societies. English kings, for instance, ordered their agents to "conquer, occupy and possess" the lands of the "heathens and infidels," but said nothing of the people inhabiting them, while Spain, following the dictates of Pope Alexander VI, sought not only to grab the land but also to make any pagans found on it "embrace the Catholic faith and be trained in good morals." In Spain, both Crown and Church saw colonizing and conversion as a unified effort. Priests accompanied each military expedition for the purpose of Christianizing the natives. Within a month of landing in Mexico, Bernal Díaz reminds us, Cortés presided over the first Indian baptisms, of twenty women given to the Spanish soldiers by the Tabascans of the coast: "One of the Indian ladies was christened Doña Marina. She was a truly great princess, the daughter of Caciques and the mistress of vassals ... they were the first women in New Spain to become Christians. Cortés gave one of them to each of his captains."\textsuperscript{22}

As the Conquest proceeded, priests performed such baptisms by the thousands. Before the holy water could dry on their foreheads, the Indian women were routinely grabbed as concubines by Spanish soldiers and settlers. The priests even performed occasional marriages between Spaniards and Indians, especially among the elite of both groups, thus fostering and legitimizing a new mestizo race in America. For example, Peruvian historian Garcilaso de la Vega, called El Inca, was born in 1539 to a Spanish officer and an Inca princess, while the parish register of Saint Augustine, Florida, recorded twenty-six Spanish-Indian marriages in the early 1700s, at a time when only a few hundred natives resided near the town.\textsuperscript{23} Far more important than legal marriages, however, was the extraordinary number of consensual unions. Francisco de Aguirre, among the conquistadores of Chile, boasted that by fathering more than fifty mestizo children, his service to God had been "greater than the sin incurred in doing so."\textsuperscript{24}

The first English colonies, by contrast, began as family settlements,
They maintained strict separation from Indian communities, sometimes even bolstered by segregation laws. In North America, Indians rarely served as laborers for settlers or as household servants, and unmarried sexual unions between natives and whites were rare except for captives of war.

The English, furthermore, never saw proselytizing among the Indians as important. True, the Virginia Company listed missionary work as one of its purposes when the Crown granted Jamestown its charter in 1607. And nine years later, the Crown even ordered funds raised from all parishes in the Church of England to erect a college for the natives. But the company never sent a single missionary to Virginia and the college was never built. Officials simply diverted the money for their own ends until an investigation of the fraud prompted the Crown to revoke the company’s charter and take over direct administration of the colony in 1622.

Likewise, the New England Puritans segregated themselves from the Indians not even venturing out of their settlements to win converts until decades after their arrival. In 1643, sections of Harvard College were built with money raised by the New England Company among Anglicans back home. While donors were told the funds would be used for Indian education, some of the money ended up buying guns and ammunition for the colonists. So minor was Puritan concern for the Indians’ souls that by 1674, fifty-five years after the founding of Plymouth Colony, barely a hundred natives in all New England were practicing Christians.

At one time or another, clerics Roger Williams of Rhode Island, Cotton Mather of Massachusetts Bay, and Samuel Purchas of Virginia all vilified the natives as demonic. The Reverend William Bradford, one of the original Pilgrim leaders, insisted they were “cruel, barbarous and most treacherous... not being content only to kill and take away a life, but delight to torment men in the most bloody manner.” Throughout colonial history, only Williams’s Rhode Island colony and the Quakers of Pennsylvania showed themselves willing to coexist in harmony with their Indian neighbors. Despite their low view of the Indians, the English settlers did not try to bring them under heel. At first, they merely purchased or fiangled choice parcels of land from some tribes and pressured others to move toward the interior.

In the Spanish colonies, however, the natives were far more numerous, and the policies of the Catholic Church far more aggressive. Church leaders did more than merely recognize Indian humanity or accommodate mestizaje. The Church dispatched an army of Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit monks, who served as the vanguard of sixteenth-century Spanish colonialism. The monks who flocked to America perceived the chaotic rise of capitalism in Europe as auguring an era of moral decay. In the Native Americans they imagined a simpler, less corrupted human being, one who could more easily be convinced to follow the word of Christ. So they abandoned Spain to set up their missions in the most remote areas of America, far from the colonial cities and encomiendas.

Those missions—the first was founded by Las Casas in Venezuela in 1520—became the principal frontier outposts of Spanish civilization. Many had farms and schools to Europeanize the Indians and research centers where the monks set about learning and preserving the native languages. Quite a few of the monks were inspired by Thomas More, whose widely read Utopia (1516) portrayed a fictional communal society of Christians located somewhere on an island in America. One of More’s most ardent admirers was Vasco de Quiroga, who established a mission of thirty thousand Tarascans in central Mexico and rose to bishop of Michoacán. Quiroga, like More, talked of trying to “restore the lost purity of the primitive Church.” Since Indians had no concept of land ownership or money, the missionaries easily organized cooperative tilling of the land and even communal housing, just as More espoused.

The natives proved less malleable and far less innocent than the Europeans imagined, so much so that early colonial history is filled with countless stories of monks who met hideous deaths at the hands of their flocks: Despite those tragedies, the monks kept coming, and as the years passed, some of their missions even prospered. That prosperity enraged colonial landowners, who increasingly regarded mission Indian labor as unwanted competition for the products of their plantations. In 1767, the colonial elite finally succeeded in getting the Jesuits, the most independent of the monastic orders, expelled from the New World. By then, 2,200 Jesuits were working in the colonies and more than 700,000 Indians resided in their missions.

Long before those Jesuit expulsions, Spanish monks played a crucial role in colonizing major parts of the United States. Most important were the Franciscans, who founded nearly forty flourishing missions in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama during the 1600s and numerous others in the Southwest. Saint Augustine was the headquarters for the Florida missions, which as many as twenty thousand Christianized Indians lived. While most of the Florida missions eventually were abandoned, several in the Southwest later turned into thriving towns, with Spanish monks to-
The Florida missions and settlements left a greater imprint on frontier American culture than we might believe. That influence was not always a direct one. Rather, it came by way of the Indians and Africans who remained after the missionaries were gone and who carried on some of the customs they learned from the Spanish settlers. Indians who traded with Europeans at Pensacola in 1822 were “better acquainted with the Spanish language than either the French or English,” notes historian David Weber, and Englishmen who settled in Virginia, Carolina, and Georgia encountered Indians who were already cultivating peach trees the Spanish had introduced from Europe. Weber notes that the missionaries of Florida and New Mexico “taught native converts to husband European domestic animals—horses, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens; cultivate European crops, from watermelon to wheat; raise fruit trees, from peaches to pomegranates; use such iron tools as wheels, saws, chisels, planes, nails, and spikes; and practice those arts and crafts that Spaniards regarded as essential for civilization as they knew it.”

The knowledge the missionaries imparted to the Indians, whether in agriculture, language, customs, or technology, did not disappear when the last monk departed. Rather, it remained part of Indian experience so that by the time Anglos began settling in the Southeast, they discovered the “civilized tribes,” among them the Creeks, the Cherokees, and the Choctaws. Even some of the most nomadic and fierce of the Southwest nations, the Apaches, Comanches, and Kiowas partially assimilated into Spanish society. In one unusual case, Apache Manuel Gonzalez became mayor of San Jose, California.

Apart from the missions, the Church reached into every corner of colonial life. It functioned side by side with Spanish civil government, sometimes even above it. In every town, the church was the dominant structure adjacent to which was erected the central plaza, the cabildo, and la casa real. While the Crown collected its royal fifth from the elite, the Church collected its 10 percent tithe from everyone, rich and poor, white and colored, as well as tribute from the Indians. Parish priests were the main moneylenders, and bishops held unparalleled power over the social life of colonists and natives alike. While the Church served as a buffer for the Indians against the worst abuses of Spanish civil society, it also discouraged independence or self-sufficiency and it demanded obedience from the natives it protected.

Even Europeans who dared question Church authority or doctrine were liable to be called before the all-powerful Inquisition, which could threaten anyone up to the governor with excommunication or prison, and which routinely prohibited the circulation of thousands of books and works of art it deemed sacrileges. Its demand for blind faith toward Church doctrine impeded for centuries the spread of tolerance, ingenuity, or creativity in Latin American thought.

No English colonial Church enjoyed a monopoly power approaching that of the Catholic Church in the Spanish territories. The proliferation of sects among Protestants meant each denomination, even when its leaders wished to set up a theocratic colony, could do so only within a circumscribed area, as the Puritans did in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The Puritan witch trials of the late 1650s in Salem and surrounding Essex County rivaled the worst atrocities of the Inquisition. Twenty men and women were executed and more than 150 imprisoned, but the fanatics proved incapable of controlling everyone. Long before the witch trials, Roger Williams rebelled and founded the Rhode Island colony, where he permitted all manner of worship, and other colonies followed.
similar liberal policies. Catholic Maryland enacted a religious tolerance law and Quaker William Penn set up his Pennsylvania colony, which, likewise, welcomed all believers. New York City turned into such a hodgepodge of religious groups that its English governor reported in 1687: “Here, be it not many of the Church of England, [and] few Roman Catholics, [but] abundance of Quakers—preachers, men and women, especially—singing Quakers, running Quakers, Sabbath-takers, Anti-sabbatarians, some Anabaptists, some Independents, some Jews; in short, of all sorts of opinions there are some, and the most part of none at all.”

After Parliament declared religious freedom in the colonies with the Toleration Act of 1689, the emigration of seers from Europe soared. Thousands of Germans, among them Lutherans, Moravians, Mennonites, and Amish, settled in the Middle Colonies and the hinterlands of the South, as did Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in the South.

**The Role of Race**

Beyond their religious practices, the English and Spanish colonial worlds diverged substantially in their attitudes toward slavery and race. The long period of Arab domination left an indelible legacy of racial and cultural mixing that the Spanish immigrants carried to the New World. Moorish occupiers of the Iberian Peninsula had invariably taken Spanish wives, setting off an era of miscegenation so extensive that “by the fifteenth century there were dark-skinned Christians, light-haired Moors, hybrids of every shape and complexion in Castile,” according to one historian. Some Muslims, called Mudejars, continued to live under Christian rule, while some Christians, called Mozarabs, learned to speak Arabic and adopted Muslim habits. The dress, foods, and traditions of Moors and Spaniards permeated each other’s societies. In architecture, for instance, the horseshoe arches, tiled floors and walls, and open interior courtyards so commonly associated with Spanish design in America, all drew from Arabic inspiration. This tradition of racial mixing made it more acceptable for Spanish settlers to engage in sexual unions with both Amerindians and Africans. This was especially true for settlers from Andalusia in southern Spain, the province that endured the longest period of Moorish occupation, and which supplied nearly 40 percent of the early settlers to America. At the beginning of the Conquest, Seville, Andalusia’s main port, was Spain’s most cosmopolitan city and the nexus for commerce with Africa. It quickly turned into the bustling crossroads for transatlantic trade as well. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the city counted nearly 100,000 inhabitants from all parts of Europe and the Mediterranean, including 6,000 African slaves.

But racial mixing did not mean racial equality. As the Indian population of America gradually rebounded, and as black slave labor assumed a greater role in colonial plantation production, the Spanish and Creole upper classes became increasingly fearful of revolt—so fearful that after the Haitian revolution, the Council of the Indies, the Crown’s administrative body for colonies, banned all marriages between whites and free blacks or mulattos. Despite the ban, the practice of mixed racial marriages continued, with dispensations often granted in cases where the honor of the woman was at stake. Upon denying one such request in 1855, the civil governor of Oriente Province in Cuba remarked, “There is little doubt that the dissemination of ideas of equality of the white class with the coloured race puts in jeopardy the tranquility of the Island, the largest proportion of whose population consists of the said race.”

Apart from the ban on white-colored unions, the institution of marriage itself played a distinctive role in Spanish society. It was one of the many avenues the Church utilized to mitigate the worst aspects of slavery that were so evident in the English colonies. The Church would not permit slave owners, for instance, to separate married couples, and it sanctioned marriage between slaves and free persons. Historian Herbert Klein reports that in selected parishes of Havana between 1825 and 1829, more than a third of all marriages were between slaves, and nearly a fifth were between a slave and a free person. In many parts of Cuba, the marriage rate among slaves was equal to or higher than among whites.

Perhaps even more important than formal marriage, however, was the social impact of consensual unions. No European society before the nineteenth century witnessed the level of free unions found in Latin America. Illegitimate births among free persons of all classes were close to 50 percent. Among the white upper classes, they were higher than among any other European elite. Those unions, which were invariably between white men and nonwhite women, were preferable to official marriage because they did not subvert the class structure.

The prevalence of both consensual unions and miscegenation, along with the strong influence of the Catholic Church, led to major differences between how the English and Spanish regarded the rights of slaves, especially toward the end of the eighteenth century. Until then, all colonial powers had allowed masters to free their slaves. But after the Haitian revolution, the British, French, and Dutch started to restrict manumission, while the Portuguese and Spanish colonies promoted and codified the practice.
As a result, only in the Portuguese and Spanish colonies did giant classes of free blacks develop, and with them the *mulato* group (in some countries they were called *pardos* or *morenos*) that so distinguished Latin America’s rainbow racial spectrum from North America’s stark black-white system of racial classification. In the United States, for instance, the first federal census in 1790 reported that “free coloreds” were less than 2 percent of the population, while black slaves were 33 percent.\(^\text{42}\) The same proportion of free blacks to slaves was roughly true in the British, Dutch, and French Caribbean colonies. But the opposite trend prevailed in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, where free blacks or coloreds outnumbered slaves, with perhaps 40 to 60 percent of free blacks able to purchase their emancipation outright.\(^\text{43}\) The viceroyalty of New Grenada, which included Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, had 80,000 slaves and 420,000 free coloreds in 1789.\(^\text{44}\) Cuba had 199,000 slaves and 114,000 free coloreds in 1817.\(^\text{45}\) By 1872, free coloreds composed 43 percent of Brazil’s population, outnumbering both pure whites and black slaves.

Color and status so deeply demarcated the English colonies, however, that the free colored class was considered an abnormality only barely tolerated.\(^\text{46}\) A drop of black blood made one black in Anglo-Saxon society, while in the Portuguese and Spanish world, *mestizos* and *mulatos*, no matter how dark, were invariably regarded as part of white society, although admittedly second-class members.

Racism obviously persisted in both groups of colonies, but in the Iberian ones it assumed a muted form, its operation rendered more complex by the presence of a huge mixed-race population. The quest for white purity in Latin America became confined to a tiny upper class, while dispersions for lower-class whites to marry outside their race were routinely granted. The reasons were simple. For rich whites, marriage was first and foremost a question of securing inheritance lines. Racial mixing was not allowed to subvert the class structure, though on occasion some of the elite officially “recognized” their mixed-race children, ushering them partially into white society. The arcane types of mixed-race offspring that developed in Latin America were astounding. Beyond *mestizos* and *mulatos*, there were *zambos* (Indian and black), *coyotes* (*mestizo* and Indian), *salta-ardés* (those with Negrooid features born of white parents), *chinos* (offspring of Indian and *salta-ardés*), *cuarterones* (quadroons), and even more exotic distinctions.

For the Anglo-Saxon colonies, on the other hand, inter racial marriage was taboo, by any class of whites. Even after independence and emancipation, it remained banned, and while rape or unsanctioned unions obviously occurred, Anglo-Saxons almost never recognized their mixed-race children, no matter how light-skinned the offspring or how poor the father.

**LAND AND POLITICS IN THE TWO SOCIETIES**

Beyond religion and race, the Spanish and English colonies diverged radically in the way they managed their economic and political systems. Spain’s colonies were royal affairs from the start. *Conquistadores* functioned as direct agents of the Crown. And Spain’s main object, at least for the first century, was gold and silver; by 1600, its colonies had already produced more than 2 billion pesos’ worth, three times the total European supply before Columbus’s first voyage.\(^\text{47}\) (The total surpassed 6 billion pesos, mostly in silver, by 1800.) The flood of silver coin, however, only led to massive inflation at home. Domestic industry and agriculture stagnated as more than 200,000 Spaniards left for the New World during the first century of colonization. Countless others abandoned the Spanish countryside and flocked to Seville and Cádiz to engage in mercantile trade.\(^\text{48}\) The Crown’s expulsion of the Moors and Jews only exacerbated the economic crisis, since those two groups had provided much of the country’s professional and commercial vitality. Jewish merchants fled with their wealth to the financial centers of London, Amsterdam, and Genoa.\(^\text{49}\) With Spain forced to resort to huge loans from foreign banks to meet the spiraling costs of administering its vast empire, much of the production from the mines of Mexico and Peru passed into the coffers of Dutch and English bankers and went to pay for manufactured goods to supply the colonies.

When they finally started their own American colonies nearly a century after Spain, the English and the Dutch rejected Spain’s state-sponsored approach. They relied instead on rich nobles financing individual colonies and on a new type of business venture—the joint stock company. The London Company, the Plymouth Company, the Virginia Company, and the Dutch West Indies Company all secured charters from their monarchs to populate the new territories.

While the Pilgrims and other colonists indeed fled religious persecution, the same cannot be said of the companies that transported them. Utopia for these new capitalist concerns was far less spiritual in nature. It meant the chase for enormous profit: from trading for furs with the Indians; from wood and iron and other raw materials that could be shipped to England; and from charging hefty rates for relocating England’s malcontents and dissidents to the New World. In 1627, for instance, the Lon-
London Company declared one of its objectives to be: "The removing of the surcharge of necessitous people, the matter or seed of dangerous insurrections, and thereby leaving the greater plenty to sustain those remaining with the Land." 48

The mass exodus from England and Europe, however, was not simply a spontaneous emigration of the continent's persecuted and destitute, as immigrant myth would have us believe. More than half the population of the thirteen colonies before 1776 was composed of indentured servants. Among these were fifty thousand convicts who were released from English jails during the seventeenth century to populate the Maryland and Virginia colonies, and a considerable number of children who had been kidnapped and sold into servitude. 49

Land speculators who worked in tandem with merchants orchestrated and engineered much of the exodus. Labor agents scourched the British Isles and the Rhineland for recruits to work the huge tracts of American land the speculators owned, enticing farm families to sell their property and seek instant wealth in the New World. 50 William Penn, for example, employed recruiting agents in London, Dublin, Edinburgh, and Rotterdam. Penn's merchant friend in Rotterdam, Benjamin Furly, was so successful advertising the colony in the Rhine Valley that he turned Pennsylvania into the center for German immigrants to the colonies. 51

At first, England left colonial administration in the hands of the companies, since the Crown was preoccupied with its own domestic strife and religious battles. But by the end of the 1600s, Parliament assumed direct administration through its Board of Trade, the counterpart to Spain's Council of the Indies. Even then, however, England kept its New World bureaucracy rather tiny.

The Spanish empire, on the other hand, spawned such a huge colonial bureaucracy that 1.1 million people held religious office of some kind in the Spanish colonies by the seventeenth century, and nearly half a million held government jobs. 52 Like most bureaucracies, the colonists Church and civil government slowed the pace of decision making, buried innovation under mountains of reports and edicts, and stilled all manner of dissent. In fairness to Spain, its empire was the largest the world had ever seen. From Oregon all the way to Patagonia, it stretched over some of the world's most impassable mountains, longest rivers, most forbidding deserts and impenetrable jungles. The population of its colonies, ten times that of the mother country, required far more effort to control than the more compact and less densely populated English colonies east of the Allegheny Mountains.

Latin America's great size and mineral wealth required an enormous supply of laborers. Indians and mestizos mined the empire's gold and silver, built its cities and churches, tended its lands, and grew its food. And once mining declined in importance, African slaves harvested the new gold, sugar, as well as tobacco, cacao, and indigo. For a Spaniard in America to engage in hard labor was almost unheard-of.

In the English colonies, on the other hand, American Indians never formed part of the labor force. The colonial economy depended on three groups of workers: free white farmers, propertyless whites (both indentured and free), and African slaves. Nearly 70 percent of all white immigration to the colonies until the Revolution was made up of indentured servants. Those servants, having completed their required years of work, became free artisans in the cities or moved to the frontier to start their own farms. By the time of the Revolution, the majority of the white population was comprised of independent yeomen, small farmers, and fishermen. 53 That agrarian group—simple, unassuming, skeptical of far-off government control, and determined to create a new life out of an immense and fertile wilderness—would form the cultural core of the new North American society, or at least of its white majority.

Radically different land policies further demarcated English and Spanish colonial society. Frenzied speculation in land was ubiquitous in the English territories. 54 "Every farmer with an extra acre of land became a land speculator—every town proprietor, every scrambling tradesman who could scrape together a modest sum for investment," says one historian. 55 Both the English colonial administrators and, later, the state and federal governments fostered speculation. Time and again, those in charge of government created overnight fortunes for their friends and themselves through corrupt schemes aimed at amassing huge holdings. By 1697, for example, four Hudson Valley families, the Van Cortlandts, Philipse, Livingston, and Van Rensselaers, had amassed for themselves 1.6 million acres spanning six present-day counties in mid-New York State, creating that state's new landed aristocracy. 56

Where the English had their tradition of land speculation, the Spaniards had the opposite, the mayorazgo, in which a family's rural and urban holdings were made legally indivisible, handed down from generation to generation through the eldest son. Other family members could be assigned portions of the family estate to administer and profit from, but they could never own and, most importantly, could not sell that portion.

The biggest mayorazgos went to the original conquistadores. More modest allotments were assigned to their lower-ranking soldiers, and even smaller grants to civilian settlers. As the generations passed, inter-
and recorded on wampum belts, led to a unique brand of democracy, which was based on consensus decision making by elected representatives. Their Confederation, according to Morgan, contained “the germ of modern parliament, congress, and legislature.” Since Morgan, numerous scholars have documented how the Iroquois influenced the democratic ideas of our own Founding Fathers.82 This country’s fierce devotion to individual rights, insists historian Felix Cohen, has its roots in Iroquois thought, as does “universal suffrage for women . . . the pattern of states within a state we call federalism, the habit of treating chiefs as servants of the people instead of as masters.”83

Some go even further. “Egalitarian democracy and liberty as we know them today in the United States owe little to Europe,” argues anthropologist Jack Weatherford. Rather, “they entered modern western thought as American Indian notions translated into European language and culture.”84 Several of the Founding Fathers were influenced by the Iroquois system of checks and balances. Benjamin Franklin published the first Indian treaty accounts in 1736, and he studied native societies extensively while serving as Indian commissioner for Pennsylvania in the 1750s. During one Anglo-Indian conference in 1764, he was so moved by the oratory of Iroquois shaman Canassatego, who urged the colonies to form their own federation, that he began advocating such a system for the colonies.85 Thomas Jefferson frequently delved into the traditions of Iroquois, and he praised their morality and oratory in his Notes on the State of Virginia. And Charles Thompson, secretary to the Continental Convention, admiringly described the Iroquois government as “a kind of patriarchal confederacy.”86

Other Iroquois principles that have found their way into American democracy are the separation of military and civilian power (the code of Hiawatha required Iroquois sachems and war chiefs to be elected separately) and the impeachment of elected leaders. In some ways, the five tribes were far ahead of the Founding Fathers, for they prohibited slavery and they recognized the voting rights of women. Settlers who came to know the simplicity of Iroquois society were invariably impressed with its ability to blend individual liberty and the moral authority of the clan to restrain antisocial behavior. Crime, for instance, was almost unknown among them.

England founded colonies throughout the world, but only in North America did the traditions of English common law, local control, and parliamentary representation flourish, and a good part of that is due to the influence of Iroquois traditions on the settlers. By comparison, other former British colonies, India, Jamaica, or South Africa, for example,
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failed to produce the unique combination of strong and stable representative government with individual liberty found in the United States. In Latin America, meanwhile, each effort by former Spanish colonies such as Mexico, Gran Colombia, and Brazil to replicate our democratic model met with failure.

Thus, by the early nineteenth century, three hundred years of colonialism had divided the New World into two huge contending cultural groups, the Anglo-Saxon and the Spanish-Latin, with smaller groups of Portuguese, Dutch, French, and Caribbean English colonies. The colonists of the two dominant societies had inexorably undergone a transformation. They were no longer Englishmen or Spaniards. They were now Anglo-Americans and Latin Americans. They had adapted their religion, political and economic views, their speech, their music, and their food to the new land. They had built an uneasy intertwined identity with the natives they conquered and the Africans they brought as slaves. Latin America became a land of social exclusion and political exclusion. English America welcomed all political and religious views but remained deeply intolerant in its social and racial attitudes. Latin America, subsumed by the force of its Indian and African majority, became a land of spirit, song, and suffering among its masses, its elite living a parasitic existence on immense estates. North America's white settlers, segregated from the races over which they held sway, developed a dual and contradictory identity and worldview: on the one hand, a spirit of will, work, and unwavering optimism among its small farmer masses; on the other, a predilection among its elite for cutthroat enterprise, land speculation, and domination of the weak and of non-Europeans.

The conquest of America profoundly challenged and transformed the beliefs of settlers, natives, and slaves alike, while it raised troubling questions for Europeans back home: Were all men God's children? What was savagery and what was civilization? Would the New World's racial mixing create a new cosmic race of men and women? Was Church, king, or state the ultimate arbiter of society, or were individuals free to create their own destiny? The answers they chose—and the conflicts between those answers—molded the two main New World cultures that arose. Why the Spanish colonies, so rich in resources at the dawn of their nineteenth-century independence, stagnated and declined while the young North American republic flourished, is the subject of our next chapter.

The Spanish Borderlands and the Making of an Empire (1810–1898)

However our present interests may restrain us within our limits, it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand beyond those limits and cover the whole northern half of the southern continent.

—Thomas Jefferson, 1801

When they embarked on the road to independence in 1810, Spain's American colonies were far richer in resources, territory, and population than the infant United States. Over the next few decades, however, the four Spanish vicereinalties—New Spain, New Granada, Peru, and Rio Plata—fragmented into more than a dozen separate nations, most of them crippled by internal strife, by economic stagnation, by foreign debt, and by outside domination. The United States, on the other hand, expanded dramatically in territory and population, fashioned a stable and prosperous democracy, and warded off foreign control.

Why such a staggering difference in development? Historians in this country usually attribute it to the legacies of English and Spanish colonialism. The austere Protestant democracy of Anglo-Saxon farmers and merchants, they say, was ideally suited for carving prosperity from a virgin frontier in a way that the Catholic, tyrannical societies of Latin America were not. That view, however, ignores the discordant and unequal relationship that emerged between the United States and Latin America from the first days of independence. It masks how a good deal of nineteenth-century U.S. growth flowed directly from the Anglo conquest of Spanish-speaking America. That conquest, how it unfolded and how it set the basis for the modern Latino presence in the United States, is the subject of this chapter.
Our nation's territorial expansion during the 1800s is well documented, but less attention has been given to how that expansion weakened and deformed the young republics to the south, especially those closest to the ever-changing U.S. borders. Annexation of the Spanish-speaking borderlands evolved in three distinct phases: Florida and the Southeast by 1820; Texas, California, and the Southwest by 1855; and, finally, Central America and the Caribbean during the second half of the century, a phase that culminated with the Spanish-American War of 1898. Those annexations transformed an isolated yeoman's democracy into a major world empire. In the process, Mexico lost half of its territory and three-quarters of its mineral resources; the Caribbean Basin was reduced to a permanent target for Yankee exploitation and intervention, and Latin Americans were made into a steady source of cheap labor for the first U.S. multinational corporations.

Popular history depicts that nineteenth-century movement as a heroic epic of humble farmers heading west in covered wagons to fight off savage Indians and tame a virgin land. Rarely do those accounts examine the movement's other face—the relentless incursions of Anglo settlers into Latin American territory.

Ahead of the settlers came the traders and merchants—men like Charles Stilman, Mifflin Kenedy, and Richard King in Texas; Cornelius Vanderbilt, George Law, and Minor Keith in Central America; William Safford, H. O. Havemeyer, and John Leamy in the Antilles; and John Craig in Venezuela—all of whom amassed huge fortunes in Latin American lands and products. The merchants were joined by adventurers and mercenaries like General John McIntosh (Florida), Davy Crockett (Texas), and William Walker (Nicaragua), who swore allegiance to inexperienced or weak Latin American governments, then forcibly overthrew them in the name of freedom.

Most U.S. presidents backed the taking of Latin America's land. Jefferson, Jackson, and Teddy Roosevelt all regarded our country's domination of the region as ordained by nature. The main proponents and beneficiaries of empire building, however, were speculators, plantation owners, bankers, and merchants. They fostered popular support for it by promising cheap land to the waves of European immigrants who kept arriving on our shores, and they bankrolled an endless string of armed rebellions in those Spanish-speaking lands by white settlers. To justify it all, our leaders popularized such pivotal notions as “America for the Americans” and “Manifest Destiny,” the latter term emerging as the nineteenth-century code-phrase for racial supremacy.

But along with the conquered lands came unwanted peoples: Native Americans, who were pushed farther west, then herded onto reservations, and several million Mexicans, Cubans, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans, who were placed under U.S. sovereignty. Even when Congress officially
declared some of the conquered peoples U.S. citizens, the newly arrived Anglo settlers routinely seized their properties, and those seizures were then upheld by the English-speaking courts the settlers installed. The Mexican Americans of the Southwest became a foreign minority in the land of their birth. Spanish-speaking, Catholic, and largely mestizo, they were rapidly relegated to a lower-caste status alongside Indians and blacks. Cubans and Filipinos eventually won their independence but found their nations under the thumb of Washington for decades afterward, while Puerto Rico remains to this day a colony of second-class citizens.

THE REVOLUTIONARY YEARS: FROM INSPIRATION TO BETRAYAL

At the beginning of the 1800s, few Latin Americans could have foreseen how the United States would treat them. The U.S. War of Independence, after all, was an enormous inspiration to intellectuals throughout the Spanish colonies. Some Latin Americans even fought alongside George Washington’s rebel army. Bernardo de Gálvez, the Spanish governor of Louisiana, opened a second front against the English when he invaded British-controlled West Florida, defeated the garrison there, and reasserted the peninsula as a Spanish colony. Merchants in Havana, meanwhile, supplied critical loans and supplies to Washington.

After the Revolution triumphed, Latin American patriots emulated the Founding Fathers. Fray Servando de Mier, a leading propagandist of Mexican independence, traveled to Philadelphia during Jefferson’s presidency and often quoted Thomas Paine in his own polemics against monarchy. In 1794, Antonio Nariño, a wealthy Bogotá intellectual and admirer of Benjamin Franklin, translated and secretly published the French Assembly’s Declaration of the Rights of Man. José Antonio Rojas, the prominent Chilean revolutionary, met Franklin in Europe and later shipped numerous crates of Raynal’s writings about the North American revolution to Chile. In 1776, Rojas penned his own list of Chilean grievances against the Spanish monarchy. Simón Bolívar, the great Liberator of South America, traveled throughout the United States in 1806. Inspired by its accomplishments, he launched Venezuela’s independence uprising a few years later.

Perhaps the best example of the close ties between revolutionaries of the north and south was Francisco de Miranda, the “Morning Star” of Latin American independence. Born in 1750 into a prosperous merchant family in Caracas, Miranda joined the Spanish army at seventeen. He later traveled to North America, where he served first with Gálvez’s Spanish troops in Florida, then with French general Comte de Rochambeau’s troops. Handsome, erudite, and charismatic, Miranda was befriended by several U.S. leaders, including Alexander Hamilton and Robert Morris, and he met with President Washington. After a long personal odyssey through Europe, where he served as both a decorated general in Napoleon’s army and a lover of Russia’s Catherine the Great, Miranda returned to the United States and sought to win our government’s backing for a campaign to liberate the Spanish colonies.

Like all the well-known patriots of Latin America, however, Miranda was a criollo from the upper class. That limited his ability to win a mass following for independence among his own countrymen, for the criollos, unlike the Anglo-American revolutionaries, were a distinct minority within their own society. Of 13.5 million people living in the Spanish colonies in 1800, less than 2 million were white, and only 200,000 of those were peninsulares, born in Spain. Latin American rebels lived in constant fear of the 80 percent of the population that was Indian, black, and mixed-race, and that apprehension intensified during the final years of the U.S. Revolutionary War, when several major uprisings broke out among the Indians of South America.

The specter of those uprisings made the criollos content at first to demand from Spain simply better treatment, not full-blown independence. They railed against high taxation, for more autonomy, and against the restrictions the Crown imposed on trade outside the empire. They condemned Spain’s discrimination against them, how the Crown granted only peninsulares a monopoly on overseas trade, how it excluded criollos from top posts in the colonial government, and how it confined them only to mining and agriculture. But no matter how much they might complain, the criollos dared not risk open rebellion for fear of unleashing a revolt from the multitudes they had always oppressed.

In the end, the spark for Latin America’s revolution came not from within the colonies but from Europe. In 1808, Napoleon invaded Spain and installed his brother Joseph as king, setting off a chain of events that would lead to the breakup of the entire Spanish colonial empire. The Spanish people rejected the French invaders, formed local resistance juntas throughout the country, and launched a guerrilla war to return their imprisoned king to the throne. When they heard of the events in Europe, criollo leaders in the colonies followed the lead of the Spanish resistance. They formed juntas of their own in all the major American cities and assumed control of their local affairs in the name of the king.

The rebel juntas in Spain soon convened a new Cortes, and that Cortes promulgated a liberal constitution, one that granted full citizenship to
colonial subjects in the American colonies for the first time. But the Cortes stopped short of full equality when it refused to permit the colonies, whose population far outnumbered Spain's, a proportionate share of delegates. That refusal angered the most radical criollo leaders, who decided to break with the new Spanish government and declare their independence.

From then on, the Latin American revolution charted its own course. Even Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo and the ouster of the French from Spain a few years later failed to bring the shattered empire back together. King Ferdinand, who was restored to the throne after Napoleon's defeat, refused to accept the loss of his colonies and sent his army to subdue the uppert Latin Americans. A series of wars ensued throughout the continent between loyalists and rebels, and in several regions between the patriotic leaders themselves. The conflicts differed from country to country, yet everywhere the human toll was immense. The mammoth size of the colonies made for an epic, disordered, and bloody canvas. Mexico's Independence wars, for instance, began in 1810 after parish priest Miguel Hidalgo led an uprising of thousands of Indian peasants and miners in the town of Dolores in the rich Bajio region northwest of Mexico City, using a statue of the Indian Virgen de Guadalupe to rally his followers. By the time the wars ended in 1821, more than 600,000 were dead, 10 percent of the country's population. Venezuela had lost half of its nearly 1 million inhabitants. Overall, the Latin American wars lasted much longer and proved far more destructive to the region's inhabitants than the U.S. War of Independence, which claimed only 25,000 lives.

Despite their turbulent and debilitating fight for independence, the Latin American patriots always looked to the United States for their example. Several of the new nations modeled their constitutions on ours. During their wars, they pleaded for military aid from us, and after their victory, they sought friendship and assistance for their postwar reconstruction. Most U.S. leaders, however, coveted the Spanish colonies as targets for the nation's own expansion and held little regard for the abilities of the Latin American patriots. "However our present interests may restrain us within our limits," Jefferson wrote to James Monroe in 1801, "it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand beyond those limits, and cover the whole northern if not the southern continent." Democracy no better suited Spanish America, John Adams said, than "the birds, beasts or fishes."

Miranda was the first to be surprised by the U.S. attitude. In 1806, after securing $12,000 from the British government for an expedition to liberate Venezuela, he rushed to the United States in expectation of further help, but President Jefferson and Secretary of State Madison rebuffed his appeals. Despite their refusal, Miranda managed to put together a rebel force from Anglo volunteers he recruited along the Eastern Seaboard. Once the expedition landed in Venezuela, however, Miranda's compatriots mistook it for a contingent of British soldiers. Instead of heeding his call for a revolt, the Venezuelans sided with the Spanish army, which quickly routed the rebels. Miranda barely managed to avoid capture and flee the country.

A decade later, with independence fever sweeping South America and the liberation armies battling fiercely against a powerful Spanish force, the United States rebuffed Bolivar as strongly as it had Miranda. Monroe, first as Madison's secretary of state and then as president, insisted on neutrality toward the South American wars. Like Jefferson before him, Monroe hoped to keep Spain friendly enough so it would eventually sell its Cuba and Florida colonies to the United States, a feeling shared by most of our nation's leaders. "We have no concern with South America," Edward Everett, editor of the influential North American Review, wrote at the time. "We can have no well-founded political sympathy with them. We are sprung from different stocks."

Latin American freedom, however, did have support among many ordinary Americans, even a few in high places, who opposed our neutrality. Among those was Henry Marie Brackenridge, whom Monroe sent to the region to assess the situation in 1817 as part of a U.S. commission. "The patriots... complain that our government is cold towards them, as if ashamed to own them," Brackenridge reported back. By then, the Latin Americans were becoming increasingly suspicious of U.S. intentions. That suspicion turned to bitterness after an incident that year involving two merchant ships, the Tiger and the Liberty. Soldiers from Bolivar's Republic of Gran Colombia seized the ships near the Orinoco River in Venezuela after discovering that their hulls were filled with military supplies for the Spanish army. The White House demanded that Colombia release the ships and indemnify their owners. Bolivar responded by condemning the two-faced U.S. policy. In a series of angry diplomatic letters, he reminded the White House that the U.S. Navy had intercepted and captured several merchant ships, even British ships, laden with supplies for his revolutionary army. So why were North Americans now supplying his enemy?

Unknown to Bolivar, this peculiar brand of neutrality was about to pay off handsomely. The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 ceded Florida to the United States, but as part of those negotiations Monroe promised Spain...