

The Challenge of Economic and Social Change

The Abolition of Slavery

- In most of the new nations, rhetorical assertion of the universal ideals of freedom and citizenship contrasted sharply with the reality of slavery.
- Slavery survived in much of the Western Hemisphere until the 1850s—it was strongest in those areas where the export of plantation products was most important.

- In the early nineteenth century slavery was weakened by abolition in some of the northern states of the United States, by the termination of the African slave trade to the United States (1808), and by the freeing of tens of thousands of slaves who joined the revolutionary armies in the Spanish American republics.
- But at the same time, increased international demand for plantation products in the first half of the nineteenth century led to increased imports of slaves to Brazil and Cuba.

- In the United States, abolitionists made moral and religious arguments against slavery.
- Two groups denied full citizenship rights under the Constitution, women and free African-Americans, played important roles in the abolition movement.
- The Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery in the rebel states not occupied by the Union army, while final abolition was accomplished with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865.

- In Brazil, progress toward the abolition of slavery was slower and depended on pressure from the British.
- The heroism of former slaves who joined the Brazilian army in the war against Paraguay helped to feed abolitionist sentiment that led to the abolition in 1888.

- In the Caribbean colonies there was little support for abolition among whites or among free blacks.
- Abolition in the British Caribbean colonies was the result of government decisions made in the context of the declining profitability of the sugar plantations of the British West Indies, while abolition in the French colonies followed the overthrow of the government of Louis Philippe.
- Slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico in 1873 and in Cuba in 1886.

Immigration

- As the slave trade ended, immigration from Europe and Asia increased.
- During the nineteenth century Europe provided the majority of immigrants to the Western Hemisphere, while Asian immigration increased after 1850.

- Immigration brought economic benefits, but hostility to immigration mounted in many nations.
- Asian immigrants faced discrimination and violence in the United States, Canada, Peru, Mexico, and Cuba; immigrants from European countries also faced prejudice and discrimination.

- The desire to sustain a common citizenship inspired a number of policies that aimed to compel immigrants to assimilate.
- Schools in particular were used to inculcate language, cultural values, and patriotic feelings in an attempt to create homogeneous national cultures.

American Cultures

- Despite discrimination, immigrants altered the politics of many of the hemisphere's nations as they sought to influence government policies.
- Immigrants were changed by their experiences in their adopted nations, undergoing acculturation.
- At the same time, the languages, the arts, the music, and the political cultures of the Western Hemisphere nations were influenced by the cultures of the immigrants.

Women's Rights and the Struggle for Social Justice

- In the second half of the nineteenth century women's rights movements made slow progress toward the achievement of economic, legal, political, and educational equality in the United States, Canada, and Latin America. Most working class women played no role in the women's rights movements; nonetheless, economic circumstances forced working-class women to take jobs outside the home and thus to contribute to the transformation of gender relations.

- Despite the abolition of slavery, various forms of discrimination against persons of African descent remained in place throughout the Western Hemisphere at the end of the century.
- Attempts to overturn racist stereotypes and to celebrate black cultural achievements in political and literary magazines failed to end racial discrimination.

Development and Underdevelopment

- Nearly all the nations of the Western Hemisphere experienced economic growth during the nineteenth century, but the United States was the only one to industrialize. Only the United States, Canada, and Argentina attained living standards similar to those in Western Europe.

- Rising demand for mine products led to mining booms in the western United States, Mexico, and Chile.
- Heavily capitalized European and North American corporations played a significant role in developing mining enterprises in Latin America.
- The expense of transportation and communications technology also increased dependence on foreign capital.

- Latin America, the United States, and Canada all participated in the increasingly integrated world market, but interdependence and competition produced deep structural differences among Western Hemisphere economies.
- Those nations that industrialized achieved prosperity and development while those nations that depended on the export of raw materials and low wage industries experienced underdevelopment.

- Cyclical swings in international markets partially explain why Canada and the United States achieved development while Latin America remained underdeveloped.
- Both the United States and Canada gained independence during periods of global economic expansion.
- Latin American countries gained independence during the 1820s, when the global economy was contracting.

- Weak governments, political instability, and (in some cases) civil war also slowed Latin American development.
- Latin America became dependent on Britain and, later, on the United States for technology and capital.

Altered Environments

- Population growth, economic expansion, and the introduction of new plants and animals brought about deforestation, soil exhaustion, and erosion. Rapid urbanization put strain on water delivery systems and sewage and garbage disposal systems and led to the spread of the timber industry.
- The expansion of the mining industry led to erosion and pollution in the western United States, Chile, and Brazil.

- Efforts to meet increasing demand for food and housing and to satisfy foreign demands for exports led to environmental degradation but also contributed to economic growth.
- Faced with a choice between protecting the environment or achieving economic growth, all of the hemisphere's nations chose economic growth.