

The Diversity of American Colonial Societies

1530–1770



Spanish America and Brazil



Why Were the Spanish Victorious?

- **The Spanish had superior military technology, such as muskets, cannons, and armor. They used horses, which frightened some Indians, who had never seen such animals.**

- **The Spanish were able to take advantage of division and discontent among the Indians. In fact, Indians provided the Spanish with much of their fighting power.**
- **Disease brought by the Europeans weakened the Aztecs and Incas.**
- **Many Indians believed that the disasters they suffered marked the end of the world.**

GOVERNMENT

- Spain was determined to maintain strict control over its empire.
- The empire was divided into five provinces, each of which was ruled by a **viceroy**.
- The Council of the Indies helped pass laws for the colonies.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

- The Church worked with the government to convert Native Americans to Christianity.
- Church leaders often served as royal officials.
- Spanish **missionaries** forcibly imposed European culture over Native American culture.

THE ECONOMY

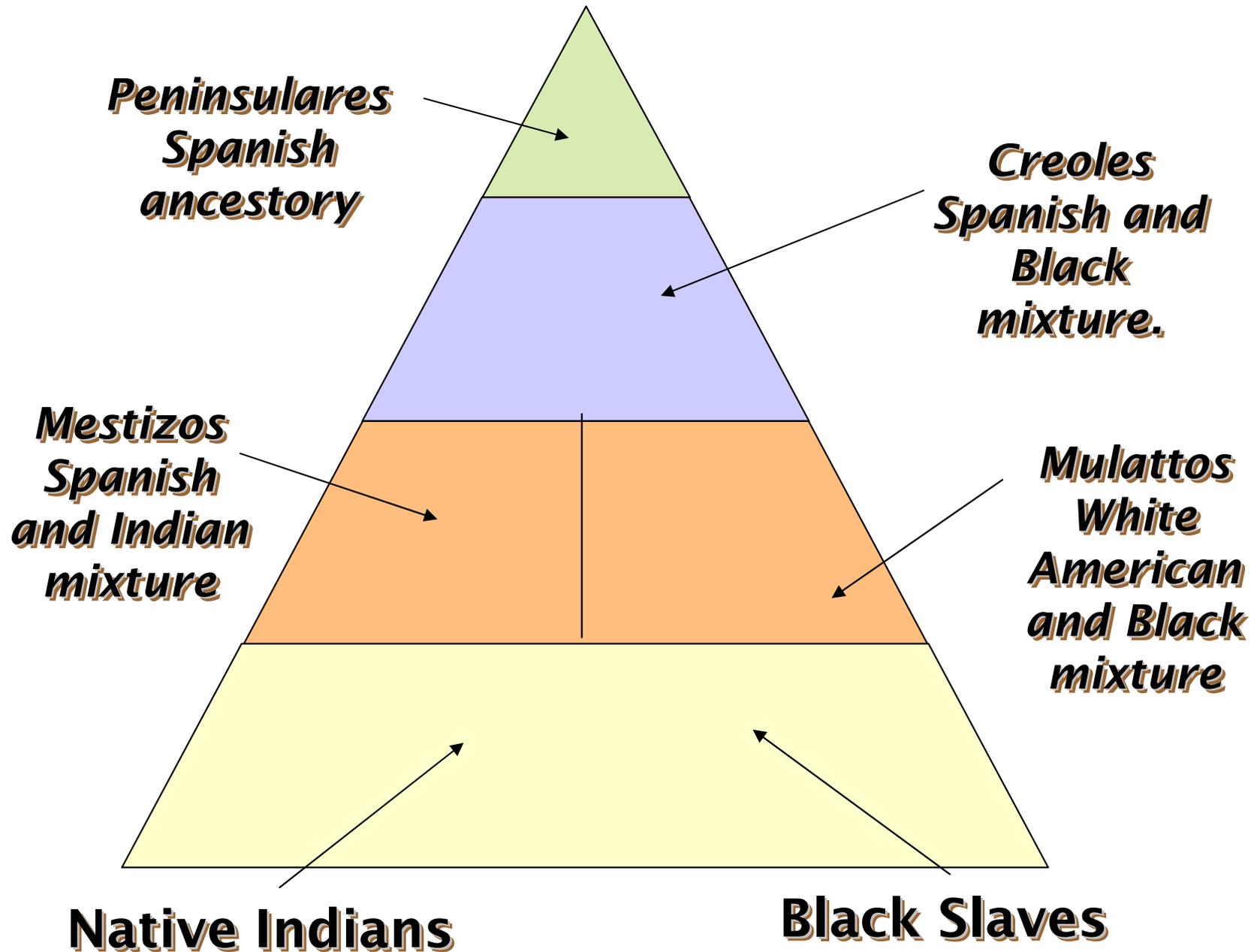
- Spain closely controlled economic activity, especially trade.
- The Spanish grew sugar cane, which was grown on **plantations** and required large numbers of workers.
- At first, the Spanish forced the Native Americans to work under brutal conditions.
- Later, the colonists began shipping slaves from Africa to do their work.

Colonial Society

In Spanish America, the mix of diverse people gave rise to a new social structure.

- **Peninsulares**, people born in Spain, were at the top of society.
- **Creoles**, American-born descendants of Spanish settlers, were next.

The Colonial Class System



Colonial Society

- **Mestizos** were people of Native American and European descent.
- **Mulattoes** were people of African and European descent.
- Native Americans and people of African descent formed the lowest social classes.

Colonial Culture

- The blending of Native American, African, and European peoples and traditions resulted in a new American culture.
- Colonial cities were centers of government, commerce, and European culture.

Colonial Culture

- To meet the Church's need for educated priests, the colonies built universities.
- Although Spanish culture was dominant in the cities, the blending of diverse traditions changed people's lives throughout the Americas.

Challenging Spanish Power

- **To get around Spain's strict control over colonial trade, smugglers traded illegally with Spanish colonists.**

- Dutch, English, and French pirates preyed on Spanish treasure ships. Some of these pirates, called **privateers**, even operated with the approval of European governments.
- The Dutch, English, and French hunted for other gold empires and for a northwest passage to Asia.

State and Church

- The Spanish crown tried to exert direct control over its American colonies through a supervisory office called the *Council of the Indies*
- There was difficulty of communication between Spain and the New World.
- This led to a situation in which the Viceroy of New Spain and Peru and their subordinate officials enjoyed a substantial degree of power.

- Eventually, Brazil in 1720 would be appointed a viceroy.
- Brazil, prior to 1720 was not developed because early settlers found no mineral wealth or rich native empires

Catholic Church

- The Catholic Church played an important role in transferring European language, culture, and Christian beliefs to the New World.
- Catholic clergy converted large numbers of Amerindians,
- However many Amerindians secretly held on to some of their native beliefs and practices

Protections from Catholic Clergy

- Catholic clergy also acted to protect Amerindians from some of the exploitation and abuse of the Spanish settlers.
- One example is Bartolome de Las Casas, a former settler turned priest
- He denounced Spanish policies toward the Amerindians and
- He worked to improve the status of Amerindians through legal reforms such as the New Laws of 1542.
- New laws of 1542 – This legislation outlawed the enslavement of Amerindians and limited forced labor.

Catholic Missionaries

- Catholic missionaries were frustrated
- Amerindian converts blended Christian beliefs with elements of their own cosmology and ritual.
- In response, the Church redirected its energies toward the colonial cities and towns
- Here the Church founded universities and secondary schools
- The church played a significant role in the intellectual and economic life of the colonies

Society in Colonial Latin America

- The elite of Spanish America consisted of a relatively small number of Spanish immigrants and a larger number of their American-born descendants (creoles).
- The Spanish-born dominated the highest levels of government, church, and business, while the creoles controlled agriculture and mining

- Under colonial rule the cultural diversity of Amerindian peoples and the class differentiation within the Amerindian ethnic groups both were eroded

People from Africa

- People of African descent played various roles in the history of the Spanish colonies
- Slaves and free blacks from the Iberian Peninsula participated in the conquest and settlement of Spanish America;
- Later, the direct slave trade with Africa led both to an increase in the number of blacks and to a decline in the legal status of blacks in the Spanish colonies

- At first, people brought from various parts of Africa retained their different cultural identities
- In time their various traditions blended and mixed with European and Amerindian languages and beliefs to form distinctive local cultures
- Slave resistance, including rebellions, was always brought under control, but runaway slaves occasionally formed groups that defended themselves for years.

- Most slaves were engaged in agricultural labor and were forced to submit to harsh discipline and brutal punishments
- The overwhelming preponderance of males made it impossible for slaves to preserve traditional African family and marriage patterns or to adopt those of Europe.

- In colonial Brazil, Portuguese immigrants controlled politics and the economy
- By the early seventeenth century Africans and their American-born descendants—both slave and free—were the largest ethnic group

- The growing population of individuals of mixed European and Amerindian descent (mestizos), European and African descent (mulattos), and mixed African and Amerindian descent were known collectively as “castas.”
- Castas dominated small-scale retailing and construction in the cities, ran small ranches and farms in the rural areas, and worked as wage laborers
- Some gained high status and wealth and adopted Spanish or Portuguese culture



Colonial Expansion and Conflict



Imperial Reform in Spanish America and Brazil

- After 1713 Spain's new Bourbon dynasty undertook a series of administrative reforms including:
 - Expanded inter-colonial trade,
 - New commercial monopolies on certain goods,
 - A stronger navy
 - Better policing of the trade in contraband goods to the Spanish colonies.
- These reforms coincided with the eighteenth-century economic expansion that was led by the agricultural and grazing economies of Cuba, the Rio de la Plata, Venezuela, Chile, and Central America

- The Bourbon policies were detrimental to the interests of the grazing and agricultural export economies, which were increasingly linked to illegitimate trade with the English, French, and Dutch.
- The new monopolies aroused opposition from creole elites whose only gain from the reforms was their role as leaders of militias that were intended to counter the threat of war with England

- The Bourbon policies were also a factor in the Amerindian uprisings, including that led by the Peruvian Amerindian leader José Gabriel Condorcanqui (Tupac Amaru II).
- The rebellion was suppressed after more than two years and cost the Spanish colonies over 100,000 lives and enormous amounts of property damage

- Brazil also underwent a period of economic expansion and administrative reform in the 1700s.
- Economic expansion fueled by gold, diamonds, coffee, and cotton underwrote the Pombal (1750-1777) reforms, paid for the importation of nearly 2 million African slaves, and underwrote a new wave of British imports