THREE

RULING NEW WORLD EMPIRES

Chronology

1501–8 Papal bulls formalizing *patronato real* in the Indies for Spanish Crown
1503 House of Trade established in Seville
1511 First *audiencia* created for Indies in Santo Domingo
1524 Council of the Indies founded; twelve Franciscans inaugurate “spiritual conquest” in New Spain
1530s Hereditary captaincies created in Brazil
1535 Viceroyalty of New Spain created
1542 Viceroyalty of Peru created
1549 Portuguese Crown purchases captaincy of Bahia and names royal governor-general; first Jesuits arrive in Brazil
1557 Sale of municipal offices extended from Castile to the Indies
1569 Authorization of Tribunals of the Inquisition in Mexico City and Lima
1609 First high court of appeals (relação) established for Brazil
1610 Authorization of Tribunal of the Inquisition in Cartagena, New Granada
1633 Spanish Crown begins systematic sale of appointments to treasury positions
1677 Spanish Crown inaugurates systematic sale of appointments to provincial positions
1687 Spanish Crown begins systematic sale of appointments to *audiencias*

Imperial Organization and Administration

The New World’s huge size and distance from Iberia formed an immutable background against which the Castilian and Portuguese crowns sought to establish and maintain their authority. Ambitious conquistadors in the Spanish colonies and early settlers there and in Brazil sought to become genuine aristocrats with all the seigneurial rights such status implied. Spanish and Portuguese rulers, in turn, opposed the emergence of a powerful, hereditary nobility located beyond their direct control. In addition, they expected the colonies to contribute to royal revenue. To address these problems, the Crowns relied on bureaucrats located both on the
peninsula and in the Americas. The expansion of New World settlement invariably brought a complement of officials to the capital of each new colonial territory. For nearly three centuries the presence of royal bureaucrats contributed significantly to the colonies’ overall political stability.

Problems of Time and Distance

The distance and resulting length of time for communication between the New World and Iberia affected both the offices established in the Americas and the authority their incumbents enjoyed. Winds and currents normally made the trip from Iberia to the Indies shorter than the return voyage. The following table indicates approximate convoy sailing times in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to and from Cádiz, Sanlúcar, or Seville and selected ports. Many voyages, however, were shorter or longer, sometimes by several weeks. Sailing from Lisbon to Bahia took seventy to nearly one hundred days; voyages to Recife were a little shorter and to Rio de Janeiro slightly longer. The combination of winds and currents made the travel from Belém, near the mouth of the Amazon, and other northern Brazilian ports to Lisbon easier than to Bahia, thus making communication with officials in the metropolis more convenient than with those in the colonial capital. Slave ships from Angola could reach any Brazilian port in the comparatively brief time of thirty-five to sixty days.

A fleet sent from Spain to the Indies usually returned fourteen to fifteen months later. Annual fleets in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries helped maintain orderly commerce and communication by reducing the time between departures. Small mail boats provided supplemental service, but their sailings were intermittent in the sixteenth century and often only two to four times a year in the seventeenth century, despite the growing irregularity of the fleet’s sailings.

The coastal location of all of Brazil’s major cities until the establishment of São Paulo facilitated their communication with Lisbon. The inland location of Mexico City and Bogotá, in contrast, added the extra time of land travel. Maintaining speedy communication with cities on the Pacific coast side of the Andes was even more difficult. Travel time from

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<th>Days from Andalusian port to</th>
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<td>Canary Islands</td>
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the mining center of Potosí to the Panamanian port of Portobelo, for example, was often seven weeks or more.

The constraints on the speed of communication between any location in the New World and Lisbon or Madrid gave officials resident in the New World greater authority than their counterparts on the peninsula had. At the same time, the distance separating the colonies from their metropoles exacerbated the problem of overseeing the officials themselves. The consequence was substantial flexibility when officials far from the source of their authority responded to local pressures.

Overview of Administration for the Spanish Colonies

The immense physical extent, the presence of densely populated and advanced sedentary civilizations, and scattered rich mineral deposits in the New World led the Crown of Castile to move quickly to gain control over conquistadors, settlers, and natives as successive regions were added to its domain. Most of the major administrative offices used to oversee its political and financial interests, provide justice to colonists and natives, and supervise the allocation of resources—primarily land, native labor, and offices—in the Indies were operating by 1535, although their number increased with later settlement. Fully developed by 1570, the administrative organization underwent little structural modification until the eighteenth century.

The Castilian Crown transplanted a number of institutions proven in Spain and the Canary Islands. General oversight of the colonies and administration of their largest territorial divisions followed the Aragonese model, in which a council resident at court provided the overall supervision and viceroys administered the largest territorial units—Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia. Below the office of viceroy, the Crown turned to Castilian precedents and introduced regional courts, provincial administrators, and treasury officials. It also allowed the municipality and its local officials toexercise a variety of responsibilities. The one institution the Crown refused to introduce into the colonies was the cortes, an assembly attended by representatives from major towns and a potential brake on its authority.

The size of the New World possessions made imperative their division into more manageable administrative units. Accordingly, in 1535 Charles I created the Viceroyalty of New Spain for land running from Panama’s northern border into the present United States as well as the Caribbean islands and part of Venezuela. The Philippine Islands also were included in this viceroyalty after their settlement in the 1570s. In the early 1540s, Charles created the Viceroyalty of Peru, which included Panama and all Spanish possessions in the Southern Hemisphere except for a strip of Venezuela. Not until the eighteenth century were additional viceroyalties created.

Soon recognizing that the viceroys were too large for many administrative purposes, the Crown divided them into units called audiencias. These territories increased in number as the lands and non-Indian
population of the empire expanded. The audiencias were themselves subdivided into districts variously called corregimientos, alcaldías mayores, and gobernaciones. The smallest territorial unit, the municipality, included a city or town and its adjoining hinterland.

Listing the territorial units from smaller to larger—municipalities, provinces, audiencias, viceroyalties, and empire—suggests a pyramidal structure culminating in centralized authority held by the king and his advisers in Spain. A more accurate image, however, is that of a group of wheels with their hubs in the audiencia capitals and their spokes extending to the provinces. The Spanish court, in turn, formed the hub of a wheel whose spokes were each audiencia. From this perspective, the imperial administration was characterized by decentralization.

The Council of the Indies

The Council of the Indies was responsible for overseeing colonial affairs from its foundation in 1524 as a "royal and supreme council" until the early eighteenth century. It ranked below the Council of Castile or Royal Council but above all other councils in Spain. Like the older Royal Council for Castile, the Council of the Indies oversaw every kind of government activity in the colonies. Legislative, judicial, financial, commercial, military, and ecclesiastical matters fell under its purview in the blending of authority characteristic of Spanish administrative offices. The council issued laws, made recommendations to the monarch, approved major expenditures in the colonies, and heard cases appealed from the American audiencias and the House of Trade. It also made arrangements for residencias, the judicial reviews conducted at the conclusion of officials' terms of office, and occasional general inspections, or visitas. In addition, it exercised royal patronage over the Church in the American realms and recommended candidates for most of the high-ranking positions in the New World.

The council employed a variety of senior officials and support staff, with councilors assisted by crown attorneys forming its core. The first councilors were men with university training in civil or canon law, or ministros togados (robed ministers), who had previously served on a lower court. In 1604, however, Philip III began naming men with neither credentials in jurisprudence nor a common professional experience. The absence of professional criteria for the appointment of these ministers de capa y espada (cape and sword) opened the door to favoritism and abuse.

Only a dozen ministros togados named before 1700 had prior New World experience. Moreover, those who were familiar with American affairs usually advanced to the Council of Castile. The Crown's failure to come to grips with basic personnel issues thus weakened the Council of the Indies' ability to provide high-quality oversight and administration. The delays inherent in administration by committee, coupled with the ongoing
problem of slow communication with officials in the New World, also reduced the tribunal’s effectiveness.

Illustrative of the togados’ careers during the Habsburg rule was that of Asturian Alonso de Llano y Valdés. After study at the University of Salamanca, Llano entered the prestigious senior residential college at the University of Valladolid. He earned a baccalaureate in civil law in 1645 and soon held chairs in law. After service in the Chancellory of Granada that began in 1653, he briefly was regent of the Council of Navarre. Named a minister togado of the Council of the Indies in 1664, he advanced to the Council of Castile in less than four years. Although his well-established
bureaucratic family origins undoubtedly hastened Llano’s progress, the kinds of positions he received before advancing to the Council of the Indies were typical, as was the absence of service in the New World.

**Viceroy**

When Charles I sent Antonio de Mendoza to New Spain as its first viceroy, he was acknowledging that despite having taken political power from Cortés, his earlier efforts to establish order and stability in the region had failed. Mendoza, the scion of one of Castile’s most illustrious noble families, introduced the requisite aura of proximity to the monarch and display of authority. As Charles’s personal representative, he lived in a palace with sixty Indians in constant attendance and a personal escort of gentlemen.

As the foremost executives in the colonies, the viceroys were responsible for general administration; the imposition, collection, and disbursement of taxes and the remittance of surplus revenue to Spain; the construction and maintenance of public works; the maintenance of public order; defense against both internal rebellions and foreign enemies; support of the Church; protection of the Indians; and the exercise of patronage. At the same time, other high-ranking officials, ecclesiastical hierarchies, audiencias, treasury officials, and corporate bodies constrained the viceroys’ ability to act independently. The Council of the Indies received from these political rivals correspondence regarding the viceroy’s activities and issued an endless stream of orders for implementation. Although the viceroy could delay them and contribute to a revision of directives through the formula **obedezco pero no cumplí** (“I obey but I do not execute”), repeated failure to carry out royal mandates invited conflict and judicial scrutiny after the residencia.

Mendoza was the first of ninety-two viceroys in the Indies. Although he and several other viceroys in the sixteenth century served for a decade or more, the average tenure in office for viceroys in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was between six and seven years. With few exceptions, viceroys were born and reared in Spain; for them the New World was a place to serve but not their home. Especially with its earliest appointments, the Crown exercised special care to name men of impeccable social standing and demonstrated ability. Most bore titles of nobility. Viceroys expected and, despite legal prohibitions, often sought to use their office to benefit both themselves and the large retinues of family, friends, and retainers who accompanied them to their post. By naming retainers to lucrative commissions and positions and smiling beneficently when their minions married well-placed local women or their wives’ ladies-in-waiting made favorable matches, the viceroys set an example that other bureaucrats tried to emulate.

Each audiencia district had an executive head. The viceroys themselves exercised direct authority over the audiencia in which their capital was located. By the late sixteenth century in the subordinate audiencia districts, each court had a president-governor who held executive authority. In most
Brazilian Counterpoint

Portuguese administration in Brazil developed more slowly and modestly in scale than did its Spanish American counterpart. The early concentration of the small colonial population in several coastal locations, the difficulty of intracolonial communication between northern and southern settlements, and the absence of a powerful and ambitious group of conquistadors contributed to a more regionally decentralized and smaller administrative system than that found in the Spanish colonies.

Administrative responsibility for Brazil was divided among various agencies and offices in Portugal. There was no Portuguese equivalent to Spain’s Council of the Indies until a decade-long experiment in the early seventeenth century. Then in 1642 the Braganza dynasty created the Overseas Council which exercised many functions for Portugal’s empire similar to those of the Council of the Indies. The Desembargo do Paço located in Lisbon oversaw judicial matters for Portugal and the empire, appointing, promoting, and reviewing the conduct of royal magistrates.

Initially the Portuguese Crown sought to treat Brazil as part of the royal factory system used in Africa and Asia. When French merchants began trading for dyewood directly with the natives, however, John III (1521–57) decided that a permanent colony was necessary. In the 1530s he granted to twelve men with good court connections hereditary captaincies extending inland from the Atlantic coast to the Line of Tordesillas. These “donatary captains” received rights similar to those granted in Portugal and the Atlantic islands earlier. Each recipient was to colonize and defend his captaincy in return for a number of revenues, the right to grant land and name numerous officials, and jurisdiction in most criminal and civil matters. The Crown retained several royal taxes and its monopoly over the dyewood trade. But with the
exception of São Vicente and Pernambuco, the private enterprise donatory system was not successful. Continued French pressure, moreover, convinced John III to regain some of the authority bestowed in a manner analogous to that employed by the Castilian Crown.

In 1549 John purchased the captaincy of Bahia from its owners and named a governor-general to administer it. Following this political reorganization, exploration, Indian campaigns, and colonization proceeded in the north, beginning in the 1570s. The Portuguese settled Paraíba in the 1580s, Rio Grande do Norte in 1598, Ceará in 1610, Maranhão beginning in late 1615 with the arrival of an expedition to expel the French from a short-lived settlement, and Belém and the lower Amazon from 1616 to 1630.

As the chief executive in Brazil, the governor-general had responsibilities and restrictions similar to those of the Spanish American viceroys. He exercised general oversight of administration, defense, Luso-Indian relations, the treasury, the secular clergy, trade, and land grants. Legislation circumscribed his activities in many ways, however. The governor-general was prohibited from investing in trade or agriculture and could travel outside Bahia only with royal permission. He was subject, moreover, to a special investigation (devassa) during his term in office and a review (residência) at its conclusion, checks similar to the Spanish visita and residencia. Named to a three-year term, many governors-general served longer, some more than two decades. Most came from Portugal’s upper nobility and had been professional soldiers; none had been high-ranking clerics. Usually they reached Brazil accompanied by kin and retainers eager to benefit from their patron’s largesse.

Governors served as the commanders in chief of their captaincies and were responsible for overseeing treasury and judicial offices and protecting the natives. Like the governor-generals, they were to act under standing instructions and directives sent from Lisbon and were subject to the devassa and residência. The importance of military security on the exposed Atlantic coast led the Crown to name seasoned military veterans with administrative experience as governors. In the seventeenth century the governors of Pernambuco, Maranhão, and Rio de Janeiro were fidalgos and/or in a military order, but rarely titled nobles. Professional soldiers of commoner origins sometimes held the governorship of a less important captaincy. Nearly every governor was born in Portugal; among the few Brazilians named, almost none served in their native province. In striking contrast with Spanish America, there is no evidence that governorships were sold.

In 1621 the northern captaincies of Ceará, Maranhão, and Pará were united as the state of Maranhão, whose separate administration continued until 1772. The remaining captaincies were included in a single unit called the state of Brazil. In subsequent territorial reorganizations, the Crown generally added jurisdiction to the governors in Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro at the expense of the governor-general. It also enhanced the governors’ titles; by 1715 both were “governor and captain-general.” By 1772 Brazil had nine captaincies-general. Although the office of viceroy replaced
that of governor-general in 1720, this change in title was window dressing for a post whose effective authority had been reduced in favor of the governors and captains-general who communicated directly with the authorities in Lisbon.

Although since the late Middle Ages the Portuguese monarchs had relied on royal magistrates to extend their authority at home, they gave the donataries the right to name magistrates in their captaincies if they did not personally oversee the administration of justice. With the decision to assert royal control in 1549, however, John III superimposed a superior royal magistrate to handle appeals from municipal and donatary-named judges and to serve as the royal judge for the captaincy of Bahia. Not until 1609, nearly a century after the first Spanish American audiencia was created, did the Portuguese Crown establish a high court of appeals (relação) for Brazil in the city of Salvador. Suppressed in 1626 after the Dutch seized Salvador, the court was reestablished in 1652 and remained the sole high court in Brazil until the creation of another in Rio de Janeiro in 1751. As in Spanish America, the judges had administrative and advisory responsibility in addition to judicial service. Their frequent use in assignments outside the court adversely affected its administration of justice and led to repeated complaints about its dilatory conduct.

The most professional bureaucrats in Brazil, members of the high court of Bahia came primarily from modest families neither peasant nor noble. All had a university degree in law, almost invariably earned at the University of Coimbra in Portugal, the only university in the Portuguese world empowered to confer degrees in civil and canon law. Magistrates received appointments for a term of six years, but some stayed longer, occasionally over two decades. Their protracted service routinely brought closer ties to the region they served. Frequent promotions to a court in Portugal, usually the High Court of Oporto, and the paucity of Brazilians named to the Bahia tribunal, however, meant that the judges' social and economic bonds to the region were less common and intense than those of their counterparts in Spanish America. Corruption, nonetheless, was typical, and magistrates in Brazil repeatedly engaged in commercial affairs and often sought to become landowners. Because most magistrates reached Brazil in middle age, few married locally. The ten native-born magistrates, not surprisingly, were most involved in the local society and economy.

Except for the high executive and judicial posts and municipal council positions, virtually every office in Brazil could be obtained by purchase or royal concession. The key fiscal offices, for example, were proprietary, and the problems of graft and embezzlement noted in Spanish America were present in Brazil as well. The practice of farming out to private tax collectors the tithe, customs duties, and other imposts compounded the financial mismanagement.

As in Spanish America, the municipal council was the fundamental institution for the administration of the towns and their surrounding jurisdictions. The councils were important, among other reasons, because
they distributed and leased municipal and common land, fixed the prices on numerous commodities, maintained roads and other public works, helped control slaves, policed the town, and oversaw public health and sanitation. Councils collected taxes and fines, licensed vendors, and leased municipal property for their income. In Salvador the council had three aldermen, two local magistrates, and a municipal attorney selected annually from a list of eligible candidates in a complicated indirect electoral process. Although after 1696 a royal magistrate presided over the council and the governors named the aldermen from eligible citizens, the councils remained important spokesmen for local concerns. The fact that the aldermen were elected prevented the councils from becoming the closed and self-perpetuating corporations that emerged from the sale of the position of regidor in Spanish America. But in both Brazil and Spanish America, citizens valued council seats for their prestige as well as for the personal economic benefits available through participation in government.

Although the Portuguese Crown employed corredeiros as royal agents in the districts in Portugal, it did not extend this middle level of administration to Brazil. Instead, it relied on governors and city councils to administer the reasonably compact zones of settlement along the coast and sent circuit magistrates into less populous regions. Not until the economic boom that began with the discovery of gold in Minas Gerais in the 1690s did the Crown devote much attention to providing administration in the vast Brazilian interior.

The single most impressive feature of bureaucrats in the Iberian empires was the extent to which they were rooted to the region in which they served. Time after time the Crowns turned to newly appointed outsiders when they wanted to effect changes. Thus they employed visitors to investigate abuses or the failure to implement specific legislation. The extent of innovation, however, was often modest. Deeply rooted local elites, of which high-ranked officials formed a part, proved resilient to challenge. When examined closely, so-called change and reform often turned out to be the old politics with a few new players. Yet it was precisely the flexibility and resilience produced by the fusion of individual bureaucrats’ interests and those of other members of the elite in their district that reduced pressure within a system of bureaucratic rule.

The Colonial Church

The Church joined the colonial bureaucracy as a major institutional buttress of European power in the New World. Nurtured by the Crown financially and legislatively, the Church in Spanish America prospered under a degree of royal control greater than that exercised in Spain itself. Conversion of the Indians, the theoretical justification for the Iberian presence in the Indies, was the Church’s initial priority.
The primary vehicle of acculturation, conversion drew the indigenous peoples into the cultural orbit of the Spanish and Portuguese settlers. The missionaries simultaneously tried to shield the Indians from the corruption and immorality of the European settlers and the labor demands of an encroaching colonial economy. In addition, they imposed Christian beliefs, social practices such as monogamy, and political organization through a mission system that undermined the Indians' potential for resistance and rebellion. These changes helped prepare the indigenous communities for integration into the emerging colonial order.

The Church in Spanish America also ministered to the Spaniards there, dominated their education, and provided social services for which the Crown was unwilling to assume direct responsibility. By the 1570s, the initial evangelical commitment was noticeably diminished. A royal policy favoring the secular clergy over the orders contributed to the malaise. In subsequent years, the Church consolidated its gains, participated in nearly every dimension of colonial life, and accumulated and displayed its wealth. Spiritual enthusiasm and utopian vision declined, and an era of ecclesiastical routine began, although individual examples of clerical activism remained. The composition of the clergy, moreover, began to change noticeably. By the early seventeenth century, creoles far surpassed peninsulars numerically and firmly anchored the Church in the fabric of colonial society.

Royal Patronage

The Spanish kings' control over the Church rested on their _patronato real_, or royal patronage. Papal bulls in 1501 and 1508 formalized a degree of oversight implicit in the papal donation of 1493, and subsequent legislation spelled out the extent of supervision exercised by the Council of the Indies. Through their royal patronage Spanish monarchs assumed responsibility to promote the conversion of the Amerindians and to support the colonial Church. The Crown received control of tithe income, the tax levied on agricultural production and livestock, to sustain the ecclesiastical hierarchy, its physical facilities, and its activities. It also controlled the founding of churches, convents, and hospitals and the appointment of and payment to ecclesiastics. Clerics needed royal licenses to sail to the Indies, and their movement upon arrival was inhibited. The Council of the Indies examined all papal documents for statements that infringed on the Crown's patronage. Only after the council's approval could these materials be sent to the New World.

The Portuguese Crown also exercised a supervisory control over the Church. The _padroado_, patronage, derived from a series of papal bulls issued between 1456 and 1514. The king controlled the creation of colonial bishoprics, the appointment of bishops, the movement of missionaries, and the evangelical efforts among the Indians. The Portuguese Church, however, lacked the wealth and political power of the Spanish Church. The end of Muslim rule in Portugal in the thirteenth century gave the Church
a history different from that of its Spanish counterpart. Still, Portugal’s later expansion into North Africa and especially India gave the Portuguese Church some of the crusading zeal and material rewards gained in Spain during the long Reconquest.

The Evangelical Effort

The conquests of Mexico and Peru opened the most populous regions of the American mainland to clerics anxious to convert the natives to Christianity. Although clerics accompanied Cortés on his march to Tenochtitlan, systematic efforts to convert the indigenous population awaited the arrival of the regulars, as members of the religious orders were known. Cortés repeatedly urged Charles I to send friars, preferring them to the more worldly secular clergy. Twelve Franciscans arrived in May 1524, the first contingent of an order that would lead conversion efforts in New Spain. In the following decade Dominicans, already active in the Caribbean colonies, and Augustinians joined in the “spiritual conquest.” Although all of the orders emphasized conversion, the Franciscans approached the effort with a millenarian hope that their evangelization and the creation of a primitive apostolic church would be followed by the second coming of Christ.

The friars faced numerous obstacles to their conversion campaign. The many native languages posed a special problem, and the dispersed residential patterns of natives outside the urban centers hindered rapid evangelization. Superficial resemblances between native and Christian religious practices increased the difficulty of presenting Christianity as new and distinct. Yet the friars enjoyed some advantages as well.

The conquest transferred political power to the Spanish and gave great prestige to the Christian religion, for the gods of the Aztec and Inca had been undermined. Unlike the native conquerors in central Mexico, the Spaniards refused to respect the gods of the vanquished; the Christian God was to stand alone. The destruction of indigenous religion was systematic and persistent. Priests in particular were singled out for persecution; prudence thus dictated that the natives, whatever their private beliefs, publicly comply with their conquerors’ religion.

About eight hundred friars were residing in Mexico by 1559. At first they directed much of their attention to converting the native chicajens (caciques) and nobles who, they anticipated correctly, would bring their peoples with them into the Church. Although the Crown wanted the natives to learn Spanish, many religious quickly began to study and preach in the languages of the peoples they were evangelizing. One prodigiously learned cleric, Andrés de Olmos, preached and wrote in more than ten Indian languages. The Aztec language, Nahualt, received the most attention, for many native peoples were able to comprehend instruction in that tongue in addition to their own. Friars also taught Nahualt where it had not previously been used, in order to establish a common language in New Spain, while keeping the natives separated from
other Europeans who, they feared, would corrupt them. In Peru the friars promoted Quechua and Aymara over the other indigenous languages.

To segregate the natives from Europeans and to streamline their own activities, the friars founded villages to bring together Indians scattered throughout a region. The Indians’ declining population further stimulated his process. The Augustinians were particularly effective at founding new villages. In Michoacán, for example, they gathered together natives who had been dispersed around Tírripitto and built, using Indian labor, a town complete with plaza, convent, hospital, water supply, and well-constructed houses. In towns such as this the friars oversaw political and economic activities as well as religious affairs.

By baptizing the natives, the friars obliged the Church to provide the sacraments of marriage, confession, communion, and confirmation that would enable the new converts to live as Christians. Christian insistence on monogamous marriage immediately ran up against the polygyny common among the Indian elite, especially in Mexico. Even after two generations of natives baptized during their youth and educated in Christian precepts, some Indians still married one wife in the Church and kept other women as concubines, although this custom faded away over time.

Many Indians responded enthusiastically to evangelization. Religion was a central feature of native life before the conquest, and the vanquished could not imagine existence without belief in the supernatural. In addition, they at once recognized the Spaniards’ veneration of images of the Virgin, the Cross, and clerics. The customary Spanish practice of building churches or at least placing crosses on preexisting religious sites reaffirmed the sacredness of the locations and promoted syncretism, the fusion of Christian and indigenous beliefs. The natives’ veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the most celebrated image of the Virgin Mary in New Spain, was associated with the persistence of their earlier devotion to the native goddess Tonantzin. The Indians perceived Guadalupe-Tonantzin as “God,” much to the dismay of the Franciscans, who opposed the syncretic religious beliefs and practices that came to characterize “Christianity” among the natives. Crediting Our Lady of Guadalupe with miraculous healings, Indians flocked throughout the colonial era to her sanctuary on a hill just north of Mexico City.

In 1526 the Franciscans opened the College of Santiago Tlatelolco near Mexico City to train for the priesthood the sons of the native nobility. The students were taught reading, writing, music, Latin, and philosophy, among other subjects. Some mastered Latin and could translate it into Spanish and Nahua. Yet the college and the effort to train a native clergy ultimately failed. Antinative sentiment among many non-Franciscan clergy fueled opposition to the ordination of natives. No alumni entered the clergy, and with its principal reason for existence negated, the Tlatelolco experiment ended. From 1555 to 1591, Indians were formally prohibited from receiving ordination. Subsequent unofficial discrimination ensured perpetual inferiority for Indians in the Mexican Church.
Vasco de Quiroga entered the Franciscan order after serving as aidor on the second Audiencia of Mexico. In Michoacán he invested most of his own wealth in the creation of mission communities modeled on Sir Thomas More's Utopia. All land was held communally. New skills based on European technology were taught, but labor was closely regulated so as to prevent abuse. In addition to a church, the settlements provided hospitals and a wide array of social welfare benefits. After his appointment as bishop of Michoacán in 1537, Vasco de Quiroga continued to promote the use of mission settlements, a strategy later used successfully by the Jesuits and other regulars as the Christian frontier was pushed north to Texas and California and south to the Río de la Plata region.

The Dominican Vicente de Valverde and several other clerics accompanied Pizarro to Cajamarca. Franciscans and Mercedarians had arrived before Atahualpa's execution, and Augustinians appeared in 1551. However, the intensive evangelization of New Spain's “spiritual conquest” was not duplicated in Peru. Although the disruption of civil war undoubtedly hindered efforts at conversion, it appears that the quality of the early clerics in Peru was inferior to that of the friars in Mexico. Not until the first Conciliar Council of Lima in 1551 did the Church launch a full-scale attack on surviving Inca religious activities. Declaring all Andean people who had died before the conquest to be in Hell, the council vigorously attacked the worship of huacas and ancestors. Priests and government officials henceforth destroyed huacas and burned mummies whenever possible. The response in the central Andes was a millenarian movement in the 1560s that believed that the huacas, angry at being deserted for Catholicism, had brought epidemics, from which the only escape was a return to traditional religious beliefs. Considering the movement heretical and thus treasonous, the state was able to eliminate the threat by the 1570s.

Religious orders spread throughout the Spanish empire, often advancing its boundary of effective settlement. Nearly twenty years after reaching Brazil, the Society of Jesus arrived in Peru in 1568 and New Spain in 1572. Quickly the Jesuits came to dominate elite education in the cities. In addition, the Society soon began to establish missions in numerous locations, from the northern frontier of Mexico to Paraguay. The first of the famous Guaraní mission villages in Paraguay was founded in 1610. By 1707 there were thirty villages with nearly 100,000 Indians.

The Society of Jesus dominated the evangelical effort in Brazil after the arrival in 1549 of Manoel da Nóbrega and five other Jesuits in Salvador; the few Franciscans who had been living in Brazil had shown little interest in converting the Indians. Defeated Indians near Salvador provided the Jesuits’ first converts. As in New Spain and Peru, European military successes enhanced the prestige of the new religion and enabled superficial conversion. The Jesuits concentrated the Indians in villages (aldeias) in order to maximize the evangelical potential of their small numbers. After 1557, when voluntary concentration failed, the Jesuits supported Governor Mem de Sá in crushing
the remaining armed resistance. By 1560 more than forty thousand Indians were in the Jesuit aldeias of Bahia alone, and by the end of the century the colony's 169 Jesuits controlled nearly the entire pacified Indian population.

In Brazil the missionaries promoted the use of Tupi as a common language. In the aldeias they taught crafts, introduced new crops, and enforced European work habits and social practices—monogamy and an abhorrence of nudity, in particular. They also fostered European culture, especially music.

After the early achievements—mass baptisms and the creation of the first aldeias—the Jesuits realized the shallowness of the conversion experience. Old beliefs persisted, intermingled with Christian doctrine. By the 1560s this frustration was clearly revealed in their reports and letters. As they recognized the difficulty of converting adults, the Jesuits began to emphasize more the
close supervision and education of young males. When some of these young
converts denounced their own elders for continuing ancient customs, the
missionaries happily noted their achievement.

The development of mission settlements as a conversion tool led neces-
sarily to a conflict between the Church and the settlers. The colonial
economies of Latin America depended on Indian labor. Miners, planters,
and obraje owners coveted control over converted Indians already accustomed
to the discipline and organization of the missionaries and familiar with
rudimentary European technology. Because the missionaries, especially the
Dominicans and the Jesuits, tried to defend the Indians from what they saw
as exploitation and abuse, they continually found themselves in political and
judicial conflict with the settlers. When epidemics drastically reduced the
Indian population, these pressures grew. In Brazil, for example, the Jesuit
Antônio Vieira’s efforts to protect the Indians led to a revolt and the tem-
porary expulsion of the Society from Maranhão and Pará in 1661. Earlier,
Jesuits working with the Guaraní in disputed borderlands that separated
Brazil and Paraguay had armed their Indians against slave raiders from São
Paulo. Forced to choose between the claims of the missionaries and those
of the wealthy colonial elites, the monarchs of both Spain and Portugal
moved to restrict the Church’s control over pacified Indian communities.

The Mature Church

The secular clergy made up the ecclesiastical hierarchy that extended from
parish priests upward to cathedral chapters, bishops, and archbishops.
Unlike the regulars—many of whom took vows of poverty and whose sub-
sistence was provided by their orders—secular priests were primarily
responsible for their own financial security, which led them into a variety
of economic activities. Although they were supposed to refrain from whole-
sale or retail trade, crafts, and direct employment outside the Church, not
all seculars observed these restrictions.

Secular clergy were present in Brazil from the first decades but had little
influence. Indeed the Jesuit Nobrega characterized the secular priests of Bahia
as “irregular, apostates and excommunicates.” When the first bishop of Bahia
arrived in 1552, he had little interest in converting the natives. In 1676 the
bishop of Bahia was elevated to archbishop, and by the late eighteenth cen-
tury six bishoprics were subject to Bahia. Although the development of the
episcopal structure coincided with an expansion in the secular clergy,
approximately half of the bishops appointed before 1800 were regulars.

The establishment of bishoprics and then archbishoprics in Spanish
America and an increase in the number of secular clergy led to conflict
with the regulars. At issue was the control of the native population and its
labor and income. The regulars, moreover, were justly proud of their
accomplishments and loath to share the benefits with seculars whom they
considered inferior in ability and commitment. Their antagonism was not
limited to words. On one occasion in 1559, seculars raided the Dominican
convent in Puebla, Mexico, sacked it, broke the prior’s teeth, and departed with every item of value. In a similarly uncharitable spirit, on another occasion Franciscans armed six hundred Indians from the Toluca region of Mexico with bows and arrows and shields and then led them in the destruction of a church under the care of secular clergy.

In 1568 Philip II named a committee to investigate the relations between seculars and regulars. The resulting Ordenanza del Patronazgo of 1574 increased the power of the secular clergy and limited the regulars’ activities. Eventually, secular priests took over many Indian parishes, or doctrinas. Henceforth the regulars’ mission activities, when they took place, were in isolated frontier areas.

By 1600 the Church was beginning the financial ascent that would make its economic base second to none in the colonies. The growth of commercial agriculture in New Spain, Peru, Central America, and Brazil brought unprecedented revenues from the tithe in the 1590s. With the Jesuits leading the way, the regular orders—save perhaps the Franciscans—became active and successful landowners. In New Spain and Peru, the expansion of mining and commerce after the conquest era also created excess capital that its owners used, in part, to endow pious works.

Pious works included chantries, the foundation of convents and colleges, and the provision of dowries and burial funds. Frequently an individual established a chantry to celebrate in perpetuity privately administered memorial masses for his soul. The founder and his heir typically designated a family member as chaplain. This strategy had the great advantage of retaining in the family the income of the endowment, whether it had been established with cash, a gift of property, or through encumbering real property as though it were mortgaged by pledging specified annual payments.

The Church was the most important source of mortgages, normally receiving a return of about 5 or 6 percent in the sixteenth century. The conditions of the loan, however, had to be such that the recipient was buying capital rather than simply borrowing money at interest, a transaction that canon law forbade as the sin of usury. Not only was the Church the major source of investment capital, it also became the major colonial property owner.

As time went on, tithes; fees that clerics received for marriages, burials, and other services; gifts; and pious works enabled the church and individual clerics to become extremely wealthy. The Church acquired both urban and rural property. The Jesuits, other regular orders, and individual secular priests actively operated in the colonial marketplace, producing sugar, wine, textiles, pottery, and other products. In Mexico City and other large cities, the Church was the largest landlord, renting its property to both residential and commercial users. By employing part of its wealth and income to sustain cultural activities and welfare functions for the poor, the Church added substantially to the well-being of colonial society.

Some orders routinely opened schools in conjunction with their convents in order to educate later generations to enter the orders or assume other responsibilities in society. The Jesuits in Lima began organizing schools from the time they reached the City of Kings in 1568. The Jesuit college in Bahia had 215 students by 1589 and offered a curriculum that extended from the elementary grades to the study of theology. Together with the Dominicans, the Jesuits dominated education until expelled from Portugal, Spain, and their colonies after 1750. The Dominicans were influential in the founding of Lima’s University of San Marcos which was established in 1551 but functioned as a convent school until the 1570s. The University of Mexico, also established in 1551, held its first classes in 1558, in part as a result of efforts by Archbishop Juan de Zumárraga. Eventually universities were created in nearly every major city in Spanish America.

The immediate result of establishing universities in Spanish America was a greater number of educated creoles for vocations in the Church and the royal bureaucracy. In consequence, the composition of the clergy began to change noticeably. By the early seventeenth century, creoles had gained prominence in both the secular clergy and at least several of the regular orders. Although a few well-placed castas and Indians initially enjoyed limited educational opportunities, they were later excluded from the universities, colleges, and even primary schools. This restriction was imposed in Lima in the 1640s, despite the Jesuits’ resistance. Brazilians also entered the Church, although the absence of a university during the colonial period retarded this development.

The presence of Europeans and American-born clerics in both the secular and regular clergy added a further rift to the already divided Church. Conflict focused on the highest positions, especially in the orders, save for the Jesuits whose provincials and supervisors were named in Europe. Europeans believed themselves superior to their American rivals by virtue of their birth in the Old World. This became a grave problem in Spanish America, for the growing creole majority threatened the peninsulars’ dominance in provincial elections. The peninsulars responded by obtaining decrees that authorized the mandatory alternation of offices between themselves and creoles. In mid-seventeenth-century Peru, only the Franciscans and Jesuits were not bound by this forced rotation in office. Beginning in the 1660s the peninsular Franciscans sought, and in 1683 received, final approval for rotation in office. Eventually the Franciscans in Brazil also instituted alternation in office.

There was less conflict among the secular clergy of Spanish America. The American-born religious repeatedly sought and at times secured high ecclesiastical offices. By 1640 five men born in the Viceroyalty of Peru had been named archbishops, and another twenty-three had been named bishops in the New World. Nonetheless, peninsulars secured most of the appointments at these levels. The five high-ranking positions that constituted the cathedral chapters, in contrast, routinely had heavy creole representation from at least the early seventeenth century. Creoles also predominated at the parish level, although by 1700 there were visible numbers
of mestizo priests and even a few Indians. European immigrants were noticeable in some of the wealthiest parishes.

The increase in number of American-born clerics in the seventeenth century and the Church’s growing economic influence bound it to American soil in a way that the early focus on missionary activity had not. Nearly every colonial family of the middle and upper sectors had relatives in one or more of the Church’s branches. Leaving aside the pervasiveness of religion in colonial society, the clergy themselves were pervasive in creole society at its most fundamental level, that of the family.

The León Garavito y Illescas family illustrates this pattern. Francisco de León Garavito emigrated to Lima where he prospered as a merchant, property owner, law professor, government attorney, and alderman. About 1574 he married Isabel de Illescas. The wealthy couple’s sons included an oidor of the Audiencia of Panama, three Dominicans, a Jesuit, and a priest in Lima. Isabel’s four sisters entered Lima’s prestigious convent of La Encarnación early in the seventeenth century, and three of her daughters followed them. All became nuns of the black veil, that is, full voting members of the house, and one was elected abbess.

The seven nuns of the Illescas and León Garavito families underscore the presence of women in ecclesiastical vocations. Convents enabled women to pursue a religious life, control their own affairs, obtain and provide education, and, in many cases, live a very comfortable existence. Protected from the demands of husbands and families, many nuns cultivated the arts and literature, providing a venue for the transfer of European culture. The majority of convents date after 1570 and reached their numerical apogee in the seventeenth century. At their height, the thirteen convents in Lima housed more than 20 percent of the city’s women. Far fewer were founded after 1700 than earlier, and in Peru, at least, the number of nuns fell sharply beginning in the early eighteenth century.

The first convent in Brazil was founded in Salvador in 1677. Before then, small numbers of Brazilian women seeking this contemplative life entered convents in Portugal or the Azores. By the end of the eighteenth century three more convents were added. But Mexico City still had proportionately twice as many nuns as did the capital of colonial Brazil.

The many religious orders for women in the colonies were founded locally and maintained only loose ties to metropolitan establishments. Franciscan, Carmelite, Augustinian, and all other orders before the 1750s were devoted to contemplative routines and played no substantial educational or charitable roles. The elite within these orders were nuns of the black veil, the most educated group of women in the colonies. Almost exclusively colonial born, they brought with them sizable dowries, and they alone could vote and serve in offices in the convent and sing the canonical hours in the choir. The Convent of N. S. da Mercedes was founded in 1735 in Bahia by the wealthy heiress Ursula Luisa de Monserrat, who also became its first abbess. Rich families commonly purchased or built the quarters or cells for their daughters and made specified donations to the houses. Although convents occasionally waived the required dowry—most frequently for women of unusual musical ability—they did enforce the social prerequisites. In the convents in Lima, for example, nuns of the black veil were daughters of socially prominent families and accordingly were addressed as “Doña.”

Other women in colonial convents lacked family ties to the local social and economic elite. Nuns of the white veil served as housekeepers and in other activities considered inappropriate for the nuns of the black veil with whom they lived. Born into modest white and mixed-race families, their limited opportunities in the convents reflected their social and economic
inferiority. Still lower were the poor, mixed-race women who served the nuns of the white veil and were allowed to wear nuns' habits. With servants and black slaves present as well, the convent in many ways mirrored the society outside their walls.

The convents participated actively in the colonies' economic life. Not only did their residences, some occupying several city blocks, require constant attention, but the nuns and their servants, who totaled nearly a thousand persons in some of Lima's larger convents in the seventeenth century, were important consumers as well. In addition, the convents owned urban property both for their own residences and schools and as sources of income. As did other bodies within the Church, the wealthy convents earned capital by providing mortgages, mainly on urban properties. Unlike many male orders, however, the female orders normally did not engage in agricultural production.

The early presence and importance of the convents, the vigor of the male religious orders, the size of the secular clergy, and the continued support of both the colonists and the Crown combined to make the Church in Latin America a powerful, wealthy institution whose influence permeated colonial life. Although examples of individual clerics failing to observe their vows and conniving with colonists to exploit the Indians certainly can be found, their number pales in comparison with the many clergymen who sought to establish and maintain Christianity among the native peoples. A bastion of European culture and civilization, the Church in Latin America retained its strength throughout the colonial era.

The Inquisition

In 1569 the Spanish Crown replaced the earlier and unsatisfactory episcopal inquisitions in its colonies by authorizing the establishment of tribunals of the Inquisition in Mexico City and Lima. A third tribunal was approved for Cartagena in 1610. Unlike the fear of converted Jews (conversos) that had prompted the tribunal's creation in Spain in 1480, the tribunals in the New World were founded out of the Crown's desire to maintain the purity of the Catholic faith against the spread of heretical Protestant beliefs brought to the Indies by foreign interlopers. Once created in the colonies, the Inquisitions of Peru and New Spain periodically persecuted "New Christians"—converted Jews and their descendants—who persisted in the faith of their ancestors. Within their districts the tribunals held jurisdiction over all non-Indians who had received Christian baptism. Protestants, by virtue of their baptism, were subject to the Inquisition.

The colonial tribunals were similar to their peninsular predecessors in organization and procedure. Normally a tribunal had two inquisitors, an expert who examined evidence for heresy, a prosecutor, a constable, and a notary. Other officials were added as necessary. In addition, tribunals had
in each province of their jurisdiction investigators or commissaries, who could be lay or clerics, and lay police, or familiares, to arrest suspects and enforce the bodies' decrees. Although the first inquisitors were born and educated in Spain, by 1640 the tribunals in Mexico City and Lima had each received at least one creole inquisitor. A sprinkling of Americans continued to secure appointments as long as the Holy Office existed.

Because it was a powerful body independent of civil and ecclesiastical hierarchies, the Inquisition unavoidably conflicted with both. Its authority, moreover, made it an attractive ally for persons who found the other hierarchies unable or unwilling to support their ambitions. The judicial privileges enjoyed by the tribunal's agents further enhanced the advantages of cooperation and encouraged the participation of wealthy citizens. The tribunal also sought familiares who were well placed in local society, an approach that guaranteed prominent support.

The Inquisition initiated a case only after receiving a denunciation. Although self-denunciation was possible, usually by an individual who anticipated lighter penance as a result, generally a third party levied the charge. The accepted procedure was for the inquisitors to gather corroborating evidence before taking further action, a process that could drag on for years. When the evidence seemed conclusive, the tribunal's agents arrested and jailed the accused and sequestered his or her property for later auction as necessary to pay the costs of imprisonment.

The most important feature that distinguished the Inquisition's procedure from that of other tribunals was secrecy. The accused was totally cut off from the outside world while the case proceeded; in some cases this isolation lasted years and terminated only with death. Moreover, the victim was ordered to confess an offense so that he or she could receive absolution from and reconciliation with the Church. The victim, however, was not informed of the charge or the accuser. In a majority of cases, probably most, these omissions were not a major problem, for the accused was indeed guilty. For an innocent party, however, the problems of demonstrating innocence through such means as naming personal enemies were formidable.

The Inquisition prescribed punishment or penance at an auto de fe or, literally, an “act of faith.” An auto de fe could be private or public. Here the condemned revealed remorse for their sins and professed their hatred of heresy. Public autos were great spectacles that public officials, clerics, nobles, and the general populace attended. Throughout its existence in Spanish America, the Inquisition ordered death, a penalty given only to heretics who would not recant, in no more than a hundred cases, perhaps 1 percent of the total considered. Bigamy, blasphemy, and other offenses against public morality were the Inquisition's primary concerns. For such offenses, fines, flogging, confiscation of property, gagging, exile, and service on the galleys were the principal punishments. Punishments were more severe in the early years of the Holy Office than later. After the middle of the seventeenth century the
largest *autos de fè* had taken place, and the importance of the tribunals had begun to dwindle.

A major part of the Inquisition’s efforts to protect the colonists from heresy and unorthodox ideas involved censorship. This included both searching ships that arrived at colonial ports for prohibited literature, works listed on the Spanish *Index* of forbidden publications, and censoring manuscripts before they were published in the New World. Although these activities certainly limited the amount of protest literature that entered the colonies and slowed the publication of locally written works, the censors were most interested in ecclesiastical materials.

The Spanish population as a whole supported the Inquisition in the colonies. Most Spaniards did not feel personally threatened by the tribunal. They considered protection from heresy a worthy objective and actively participated in prosecuting those persons who strayed too far from the accepted morality. In an era in which formal political representation was absent, moreover, the Inquisition provided, during its first century of existence in particular, an alternative institution from which the colonists could seek support for their own purposes. The political dimension of the Inquisition gave added importance to the repeated conflicts, often over seemingly trivial matters, that the inquisitors had with civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

Portugal established an effective Inquisition only in 1547. Although there were several tribunals in Portugal and one in Goa, a separate tribunal for Brazil was not created. Bishops, families, or other agents that the Portuguese Holy Office employed in the colony investigated persons accused of heresy or other offenses. Those persons considered guilty were shipped to Portugal for trial. The procedures employed were similar to those in Spain and Spanish America except that the Portuguese Inquisition may have been even more harsh in its early years.

On three occasions the Portuguese Inquisition sent special agents to Brazil. The first reached Bahia in 1591 and spent four years investigating the numerous New Christians residing in the colony. Two other inquisitorial visits took place in 1618 and 1763-69. As in the Spanish colonies, local agents rather than special investigators usually filed charges of bigamy, blasphemy, reading of prohibited literature, and other infractions. Such offenses led to investigations far more often than did allegations of heresy.

The Church provided for the spiritual life of a diverse and complex population and was one of the principal buttresses of social stability and public order in both Spanish America and Brazil. It organized much of colonial society’s communal life through public celebrations associated with the religious calendar. By converting Indians and blacks to Christianity, it extended European cultural values; and its role in education and public charity further emphasized its centrality in the lives of rich and poor alike.