

# Instability of the spanish colonies



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## Section 2: Investigation

Many Historians would agree that Spain's instability gave their colonies autonomy they've been waiting for. Spain was ruled by a monarch while Spanish colonies were organized as vice-royalties whose loyalty was with the king. Spain attempted to control every aspect of colonial life through thousands of regulations, by increasing tax revenue, and replacing Creole officers to peninsulares (Strang). Despite Colonies' restricted trade, the growing Creole American identity, and the disrespect peninsulares had toward creoles which created discontent among creoles, Spanish colonies did little to change the status quo. Although there were some uprisings in the 1780s such as the Tupac Amaru rebellion, they fought not for their independence and rights but for a change in the system under the monarchy; their slogan was "*viva el rey y muera al mal gobierno*" (long live the king and death to bad government) (Strang, "popular sovereignty and decolonization"). Colonies' call for independence was instead triggered by an external force: The collapse of Spain (Blaufarb, "the Western Question"). Napoleon's invasion of Spain and the accession of Joseph Bonaparte onto the Spanish throne sparked revolts in Latin America (Strang, "popular sovereignty and decolonization"), because Bonaparte wasn't seen as their legitimate king. In cities not yet controlled by the French and in Spanish colonies, Juntas were created in the name of the absent king: Ferdinand VII (Strang, "popular sovereignty and decolonization"). Although the colonies were still loyal to the monarchy, the idea that the power would be given to the people became increasingly prevalent; each city now only had their own interests in mind due to the fact that they couldn't answer to the king. The

first two juntas established were the junta of Chuquisaca in today's Bolivia and of la Paz; the junta of Bolivia was created to reassure its allegiance to the junta central in Spain while Junta of la Paz was created because they wanted to separate from the crown (Donghi, "The Contemporary History of Latin America"). The establishment of la Paz created tensions in the Americas. Bolivian Historiographers believed it to be the beginning of their struggle for independence (Donghi, "The Contemporary History of Latin America"). Many juntas created from then on wanted to be part of a government of "liberty and independence" (Donghi, "The Contemporary History of Latin America").

Meanwhile in Spain, Bonaparte was still ruling the empire, and was instable more than ever. The invasion depleted Spain's assets which started a debate over the nature of sovereignty which will start a civil war (Blaufarb, "the Western Question"). Communication was also severed between Spain and its colonies after France took control of Spain. The collapse of the Spanish empire and its weakened authority, created an international competition over Spanish colonies (Blaufarb, "the Western Question"). After the invasion Britain attempted to keep Spanish America together in order to exploit their resources and also keep France from taking control of the colonies (Blaufarb, "the Western Question"). Since Spain was in chaos, they couldn't enforce trade restrictions giving colonies the freedom to trade with any nation which benefited Britain. Britain therefore had an incentive to use its naval power to keep France from taking over. Britain loosened their control of the Atlantic after the war was over. In 1815, although business went back to normal, tensions increased within the Spanish monarchy; wartime unity among

Spaniards to fight against France disappeared after Ferdinand VII regained power, and some even turned against Ferdinand and allied with Latin American rebels to end the monarchy (Blaufarb, “ the Western Question”). To take advantage of Spain’s instability and declare independence would be seen as treacherous, additionally the colonies were optimistic that Ferdinand would embrace reform which wasn’t the case. After it became clear that the colonies will not return to obedience, Ferdinand established oppressive policies (Blaufarb, “ the Western Question”). As compromises became unattainable, uprisings against the monarchy began to take form and more people were sacrificed.

Although many historians agree that the collapse of Spain was caused by the invasion which led to colonies’ call on independence, historians of the reform era consider the Bourbon reforms to be a crucial cause of the revolts. The colonies started to develop an identity separate to that of Spain because of those reforms(Lynch). The change was so great that some historians, such as John Lynch, described them as a “ second conquest of the Americas” (Lynch, “ the Spanish American Revolutions”). During the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bourbon Spain sought to change its economy, society, and institutions; the main reasons of those reforms were the decline of Spain’s productivity (Lynch, “ the Spanish American Revolutions”). Their goal was to strengthen the king’s power, centralize state power through reforms, increase production with trade within the colonies, and increase revenues going to Spain (Lynch, “ the Spanish American Revolutions”). Although those reforms were established in order to bring the colonies closer under Spain’s control, it isolated the Creole population, strengthened their American

Identity and laid groundwork for the wars of independence during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lynch, "the Spanish American Revolutions"). In an effort to increase silver, and gold production (most revenues comes from mining), the monarchy decreased their taxes in half (Lynch, "the Spanish American Revolutions"). Bourbon monarchs prevented colonies from competing with goods exported from Spain by reinforcing laws that restricted colonies from trading with other empires with the exception of Spain; laws such as the legal code of 1778 "regulations and royal tariffs for free trade" (Kuethe and Andrien, "The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century"). Creole elites unhappy with those restrictions aggravated their sense of alienation from the crown. Measures taken to increase mining production increased workers' and slaves' labor which also led to their discontent. They succeed their goals of increasing trade, and royal revenues but also weakened elites' and lower classes' sense of loyalty to the crown. Spain also established two new viceroyalties (of New Granada and of Rio de la Plata), and excluded most creoles to increase royal control and weaken creoles' influence whom they thought had grown too large (Kuethe and Andrien, "The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century"), again heightening creoles' negative sentiments towards Spain. As part of efforts to reinstate royal supremacy, the crown negotiated with Rome giving them a greater authority to nominate and appoint religious authorities (Kuethe and Andrien, "The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century"). But the most significant religious bourbon reform was the expulsion of the Jesuits who had economical, political and religious power; Creoles who were educated in Jesuits colleges and those who had the same views as Jesuits found their expulsion in 1767 disturbing (Kuethe and Andrien, "The Spanish Atlantic

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World in the Eighteenth Century”). The Jesuits’ expulsion drove another wedge between the crown and Creole elites. The bourbon reforms as a whole ultimately failed to achieve their goals mainly because it deepened divisions between the colonies and Spain. The rising nationalist sentiments in the Americas enabled the formation of a separate American identity and thus laid the groundwork for the wars of independence after The Napoleonic invasion of Spain.

The bourbon reforms did weaken colonies’ loyalty to the crown; it created discontent among Creole elites but wasn’t enough to declare independence from Spain. Without the decline of the Spanish empire and Britain’s naval power which kept France from controlling the colonies, colonies would have never known what true autonomy was like. Although the war for independence would have happened sooner or later, The Napoleonic invasion precipitated those uprisings. The instability in Spain gave colonies a sense of political legitimacy and power. Authority came from the king, laws were obeyed from it came from the king, but now there was no king to obey. The colonies were able to govern themselves as power was now in the hands of the people, allowing them to trade freely. The majority of the colonies waited until Ferdinand VII regained power mainly out of fear, but after it became clear that the king wanted the colonies to return to obedience, the colonies started to revolt for their independence. On the other hand, Latin American independence would have eventually happened because of the growing tensions before the Napoleonic war, new enlightened ideas, the American and French revolutions, the financial dependency Spain had which

was revealed by the bourbon reforms, and the rise of Creoles' influence; the Napoleonic war merely precipitated the revolts.