

Chapter 21 Viewpoint Activity



It was mainly well-educated creoles who led independence movements in Latin America (textbook pages 536–543), inspired by ideas of the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions, as well as by their resentment of Spanish colonial officials. These two excerpts present two complaints: Manuel Belgrano of Argentina, and the most famous liberator, Simón Bolívar, writing from the island of Jamaica in 1814. ♦ *As you read, think about conditions in colonial Latin America. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Why Latin Americans Wanted Independence

Manuel Belgrano Since I was in Spain in 1789, and the French Revolution was then causing a change in ideas, especially among the men of letters with whom I associated, the ideals of liberty, equality, security, and property took a firm hold on me, and I saw only tyrants in those who would restrain a man, wherever he might be, from enjoying the rights with which God and Nature had endowed him. . . .

I finally departed from Spain for Buenos Aires; I cannot sufficiently express the surprise I felt when I met the men named by the king [of Spain] to the council which was to deal with agriculture, industry, and commerce and work for the happiness of the provinces composing the vice-royalty of Buenos Aires. All were Spanish merchants. With the exception of one or two they knew nothing but their monopolistic business, namely to buy at four dollars and sell for eight. . . . My spirits fell, and I began to understand that the colonies could expect nothing from men who place their private interests above those of the community.

Simon Bolívar The position of the inhabitants of the American hemisphere has been for centuries purely passive. Politically they were nonexistent. We have been molested by a system which has not only deprived us of our rights but has kept us in a state of permanent childhood with regard to public affairs.

If we could at least have managed our domestic affairs and our internal administration, we could have acquainted ourselves with the process and machinery of government. We should also have enjoyed a personal consideration, thereby commanding a certain automatic respect from the people, which is so necessary to preserve amidst revolutions. . . . Americans, under the existing Spanish system, occupy a position in society no better than that of serfs suitable for labor, or at best that of mere consumers [of

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Spanish goods].

Sources: (1) *Latin American Civilization*, ed. Benjamin Keen (Westview Press, 1986); (2) *The Origins of the Latin American Revolutions, 1808–1826*, ed. R. A. Humphreys and John Lynch (Alfred A. Knopf, 1965).

Questions to Discuss

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| <p>1. What ideas and ideals does Belgrano say he learned while studying in Spain? What was happening there at the time?</p> <p>2. Who are the main targets of both these leaders' complaints? What do they specifically</p> | <p>object to?</p> <p>3. Identifying Central Issues Why, do you think, was it the educated creoles in Latin America who most resented Spanish colonial rule?</p> |
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