Exploring the Roots of Chronic Underdevelopment: The Colonial Encomienda and Resguardo and their Legacy to Modern Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Roots of Chronic Underdevelopment:

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by

Pedro Bossio

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Colombian society has been historically marked by socioeconomic inequality, restricted social mobility, and institutional weakness. In order to understand the reasons for the country’s continuous struggle to achieve inclusive economic progress and stability since its independence from Spain in 1819, it is necessary to understand its colonial history. Central to this were the two most important colonial economic institutions, the encomienda and the resguardo, both designed for the exploitation of unfree Indian labor. Even when these were slowly replaced by more modern haciendas worked by free farm workers, the economic and political life of the country continued to be determined by older forms of subordination and exploitation established in the earliest days of Spanish colonial rule. This thesis focuses on the eastern highlands of northern South America, principally the area around Bogota, and analyzes how the encomienda, resguardo, and hacienda were fundamental in determining how wealth was acquired in the region, and the extent of the economic opportunities available to various sectors of society. Colombia’s institutionalized hierarchy based on racial and social distinctions had given economic and political advantages to a small group of Spaniards and their descendants living in the country’s most important urban centers. This is as much true today as
in colonial times. The vast majority of the population, especially in rural areas, has remained politically and economically marginalized. An examination of these historical developments will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the seemingly intractable nature of Colombia’s economic limitations and social turmoil today.
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1. **Introduction**

Colombian society has been historically marked by limited economic opportunities, restricted social mobility, and institutional corruption. In order to understand the reasons for Colombia’s continuous struggle to achieve inclusive economic progress and stability since its independence from Spain in 1819, it is not enough to record which groups have benefited the most, which have been excluded, and which institutions govern society today. It is also necessary to understand how a privileged class was originally formed, how it has historically protected and advanced its position, and more importantly, how other sectors of society have been excluded from legal protection and socioeconomic opportunities. In order to do this, it is necessary to look to colonial times to identify the roots of these dynamics, which lie in the *encomienda* and *resguardo* institutions, as well as in the emergence of the hacienda economic model. These were instrumental in determining the institutional, social, and economic structure of the New Kingdom of New Granada, the area corresponding to modern Colombia.

The first century after the Spanish conquest of the New World was crucial in determining the path each Latin American colony took in the evolution of its social and economic institutions. This thesis focuses on the central highlands of northern South America, principally the area around Bogota. It analyzes how key institutions helped determine how wealth was accumulated in the region, and the extent to which various sectors of society were allowed access to it. Central to this was the creation of an institutionalized social hierarchy based on racial and social distinctions that gave privileged status to a small group of Spaniards living in politically important urban centers, and the marginalization of the vast majority of the population, especially in rural areas. An examination of these developments will provide a more
Columbus’ voyage of 1492 marked the beginning of more than three centuries of Spanish domination in the Americas. This period saw immense transfers of wealth from the New World to Europe and Asia. It also witnessed the dramatic decimation of Native Americans through diseases and overwork, as well as the assimilation of the rest into Spanish Christian culture. Upon arrival in the New World, the Spanish encountered unprecedented circumstances – an entire continent ripe for conquest, and the potential for the creation of an empire larger than any since that of Genghis Khan, all filled with a bewildering array of societies and cultures previously unsuspected by anyone outside of the Americas. Yet within a remarkably short period of time a small number of Spaniards created a colonial enterprise that secured for themselves a position at the top of a new and complex social hierarchy. They were also able to adapt precociously in the centuries that followed to new circumstances that allowed them to maintain that position. But it was in this first period that the creation of social, economic, political and military institutions that would leave an indelible mark on the continent was accomplished. These not only influenced the character of the Latin American republics formed in the early nineteenth century, but continue to do so today.

To achieve their imperial goals, the Spanish focused their empire building on Mexico and the highlands of Central and South America, where the most hierarchically complex and densely populated pre-Columbian societies were located. It was from here that most of the labor used in mines and on estates would come. The most important Spanish colonial cities were also founded
in the midst of these populations.\(^1\) The consolidation of the conquest was then centered on the control of indigenous labor through the establishment of religious and political urban centers that dominated the hinterland. Central to this was the creation of the *encomienda*, a tributary system for the distribution of indigenous labor among the conquerors, and Indian “reserve” towns, or “*resguardos*”, established at the Crown’s initiative. These fixed natives in areas barred to Spaniards, blacks, and peoples of mixed origins. Varying across the continent according to local geography, population size and economic resources, both institutions were nonetheless uniformly controlled from urban centers dominated by colonial elites, and only later by government officials.

While it is undeniable that the vast wealth and populations of the New World presented the Spaniards with a unique opportunity for quick riches and the chance to build new societies out of the old, they did not create without any reference to the past. Although the colonial institutions of Spanish America might have seemed unique, they were in fact heavily influenced by organizations and practices developed earlier in Spain. Centuries of war against the Moors, constant challenges to the Castilian Crown from a fractious nobility, combined with continuous interactions with, and occasional persecutions of, two other major religions, left Castile uniquely prepared to deal with a great variety of cultures and the necessarily complicated interaction with them.\(^2\) Therefore, before exploring the key features of the colonial economy and urbanization, it is necessary to understand the historic evolution of that took place in fourteenth and fifteenth century Castile. This determined the manner in which the New World Empire was built, and the way in which Castilians in particular acted in it.

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\(^1\) A brief geographic overview will show that many of the most important Latin America cities are located at high altitudes. These include Mexico City, Guadalajara, Tegucigalpa, Guatemala City, Bogota, La Paz, and Cuzco, to name only a few.

\(^2\) There was no Spain at the time of Columbus’ voyages. The Crown of Castile was the dominant power in Iberia, and the main Christian protagonist in the Reconquista.
2. Background – Late Medieval Castile

The experience of the *Reconquista*, which was the centuries-long conflict to retake Iberia from the Muslims, was almost unique in Western Europe. The Spanish kingdom had been troubled at the same time by almost continuous fighting amongst its noble and urban elites, and between different noble and royal factions vying for the Crown. It was only during the late fifteenth century reign of Isabela and Ferdinand that this long struggle between the three most powerful groups: the Crown, the aristocracy, and an urban patriciate, began to be brought to an end. That same ruthless royal determination would also lead to the final defeat of the Moors in 1492. The conquest of the New World, which followed only twenty-five years later, was an extension of this belligerent and crusading spirit. Isabela and Ferdinand, by containing the power of the aristocracy and subduing their rebellious cities, had prepared the way for the rule of their grandson, Charles V, and his Hapsburg descendants over the greatest European controlled empire the world had seen up to that time.

The long process of consolidation of royal power had begun after the conquest of Al-Andalus in the thirteenth century.3 With it came the office of *adelantado* given to those military leaders who had organized the victory, and the system of *repartimientos* (distributions) through which they were rewarded. Then, starting in the fourteenth century, the office of *corregidor* was created. These royal agents were used by the Crown to impose its will on the towns. All of these arrangements would later be used in the building of the empire in the Americas.

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Adelantados and Repartimientos

The final conquest of Al-Andalus was a momentous occasion. The Christian kingdoms of Iberia had been slowly regaining lost lands at the expense of Muslims since the twelfth century, when the kingdoms of Portugal, Castile, Leon, and Aragon had finally established themselves as important powers in the peninsula. After Andalusia, only Muslim Granada remained. All this had turned the Reconquista irreversibly in favor of Castile (now unified with Leon) which bordered the deep south.

The adelantado (literally: advance man) had been one of the most important officers of the Reconquista. Had the Castilian Crown attempted to fight against the Moors across its entire frontier, it would have stretched itself dangerously thin. Monarchs were painfully aware of the risks they faced from their own cities and nobles in moments of weakness. The lands of the frontier had at the same time become depopulated because of Muslim flight to the south. If the Spanish monarchs wanted to conquer and repopulate these territories, thereby making both towns and farms productive again, military campaigns and population movement needed to be carefully coordinated.

The monarchy needed powerful men to do this. It had therefore become almost entirely dependent on its military commanders. The adelantados had leadership skills, material resources, and the financial connections to fund campaign, as well as the ability to respond to dangerous Muslim counteroffensives. Few men were able to pool the resources to fund fighting along even limited areas of the frontier. Adelantados therefore needed to be either persons of considerable wealth, or else trusted by investors. The Crown selected them from among major aristocratic families, and even from within the royal family itself. Each was granted a charter to conquer a specific area, and was empowered to be its chief judicial and executive official. These men
advanced the enterprise against the Moors in the name of the monarchy and God. They commanded private armies, recruited their own soldiers, and found the means of paying them.  

(This was no easy task. So great was the shortage of manpower that the Crown even occasionally granted pardons to criminals who were willing to participate in the campaigns.5)

The dependence of the Spanish kings on their brave, skilled, and ruthless commanders is both striking, and typical of feudal relationships between royalty and nobility common in Europe. However, these paladins proved to be a liability as well as an asset. Monarchs could not do without them if they wanted to expand their realms. But their very audacity and courage made them fiercely independent. These same qualities would later allow similar types to conquer and rule vast territories and peoples in the New World. But, once again, the Crown would soon find it almost impossible to control them. Even after as strong a monarch as Charles V began to get firm control in Iberia, royal power in the New World continued to remain something elusive, fleeting, almost ephemeral.

The Crown therefore had to compromise with adelantados by conceding a substantial portion of government and territories in Andalusia to them. Monarchs knew in these cases they had no option if they wanted to keep the land under even nominal Castilian dominion. They found it would be better to temporarily yield autonomy than to try to overstretch royal bureaucracy and resources. But the pressing question remained – how temporary would it in fact be? In this way, conquered cities and lands acquired new governors, who, although they acted in

4 The office has even older precedents, being mentioned as early as the eleventh century, and was not too different from the Roman Imperial Urban Prefect.

the name of the Crown, did not want interference in their business. Castile had expanded its
dominions and added cities, and while it is true that some new men who were not part of the
higher social strata received benefits through the repartimientos, the provision of new sources of
wealth and power to great lords created a significant threat to the power of the monarchy.6

The new rulers also began an extended period of encastillamiento (castle building). This was
justified by the need to control local populations, as well as providing better defense against
foreign invasion. However, it also greatly facilitated regional resistance to central authority.7 (It
was for this reason that later, in France, Cardinal Richelieu, as a loyal servant of Louis XIII,
demanded the destruction of castles not along the frontier in order to more easily exert royal
power over the nobility). Adelantados families were therefore able to further increase their power
throughout southern Iberia.8 These transplanted Castilian oligarchs understood that they owed
their importance “not to trade, but to military service, real or presumed, for their royal
appointment”.9

Long threatened by foreign aggression, Castilian elites had not been able to look beyond
their immediate environment if they wanted to survive. Unlike in England, the Netherlands, or
even Aragon, where elites could also engage in trade and international commerce, they could
never afford to become interested in these things – which soon came to be seen as the province
of foreigners, and beneath members of the nobility. Even among the traditional nobilities of

6 Ruiz, p. 119.
7 Gonzalez Jimenez, Poblamiento y Frontera en Andalucia, Siglos XIII-XV, p.221. Remnants of this
encastrillamiento are still seen throughout the countryside of central Spain, in towns such as Avila, Toledo, and
Valladolid, among others
8 Manuel Gonzalez Jimenez, “Repartimientos Andaluces del Siglo XIII: Perspectiva de Conjunto y Problemas” (XIII
were already signs of a new emerging nobility in the Andalusia region
9 Marvin Lunenfeld, Keepers of the City: The Corregidores of Isabella I of Castile (1474-1504) (Cambridge
Europe, continuous fighting made Castilians notable in their relentlessly uncompromising military-based identity. Theirs was in effect a “society organized for perpetual war”. Proud, stubborn, religious, and intolerant, they developed a character best known at the beginning of the so-called Dark Ages, when the defenders of the crumbling Roman Empire were faced with invasions of barbarian hordes.

Even after the tide of Muslim conquest had been stopped, and then turned, that fighting spirit remained. What had originally been an instinct for self-preservation turned into a restless and unquenchable desire for conquest. The idea that the only way to attain power and prestige was through military prowess and Catholic religious exclusiveness remained paramount. Wealth and land were to be acquired in battles against unbelievers. The medieval idea of decentralized noble power, still present in much of Europe, had been made particularly intense (and long lived) in Spain because of particular Iberian conditions. But the conquistador spirit was to have more terrible consequences. When Castilians entered the vast reaches of the New World the last vestiges of chivalrous restraint fell away. They then distinguished themselves by their ruthless aggressiveness and almost boundless rapacity.

Monarchs had understood the danger of this pugnacious spirit long before the final conquests of the south. Alfonso X had been the first to attempt to codify (and so reduce) the duties and privileges of the adelantado mayor in his law code, the Siete Partidas (1265), which emphasized the judicial aspects of the office. At the same time, monarchs found other, more imaginative ways of asserting their prerogatives. They began to assign adelantados not only to newly conquered territories, but also to the already settled northern provinces of Galicia, Castile,
Murcia and Leon, hoping in this way not only to use these agents to strengthen the power of the central government, but also to tame them by turning them into proto-bureaucrats. It did not work as the Crown had intended. Unfortunately for the monarchy, these high office holders, either on the frontier (where they only slowly began to lose their military character) or in established provinces, only came to swell the already large number of aristocrats whose ambition and economic resources permitted them to challenge royal power.

Conquering an area was just the first step in administering the new regions. The repopulating and consolidation of the southern lands followed. The difficulty of this was highlighted by the system of *repartimientos*. The distribution of plunder and land amongst the conquerors was simple and straightforward. Rewards were divided according to social status, *caballeros* (knights) taking primacy over the rest. However, the Castilian lords had to move into new and sparsely populated territories. Incentives were needed to induce Castilians to move there. In some cases, pockets of Muslims were even left unmolested simply because there weren’t enough Christians available to replace them, and neither Crown nor nobility could profit from abandoned spaces. In other cases, lands and houses were offered to members of the military orders of Calatrava and Compostela, both of which had contributed to the crusading effort.\(^\text{12}\) So great was the need that lordship (*mayorazgos*) over entire regions was offered to men who were willing and able to defend and repopulate them.\(^\text{13}\) The need for migrants became especially pressing when Castilian forces rapidly overran very large areas. But the ability to keep newly arrived populations in place was not easy. Those rewarded in the first *repartimientos*, rather than

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\(^\text{12}\) For the repopulation of the area around Gibraltar see Ladero Quesada and Gonzalez Jimenez, *La Poblacion en la Frontera de Gibraltar y el Repartimiento de Vejer*; for the area around Carmona, a town east of Seville, see Manuel Gonzalez Jimenez, “Repartimiento de Carmona, Estudio y Edición” (Carmona Repartimiento, Analysis). In *Historia, Instituciones, Documentos*, No. 8 (Universidad de Sevilla, Spain, 1981). Web. 25 October, 2017

\(^\text{13}\) Ladero Quesada and Gonzalez Jimenez, pp. 213-214; Gonzalez Jimenez, *Poblamiento y Frontera en Andalucia, Siglos XIII-XV*, p. 208
recruiting farmers and townspeople, frequently sold out and then headed outward to participate in new campaigns, where they hoped to gain even greater rewards.\footnote{Gonzalez Jimenez, Repartimiento de Carmona, Estudio y Edición, p. 67. For a more general treatment of exemptions granted to re-populate and defend Andalusia, see Gonzalez Jimenez, Poblamiento y Frontera en Andalucía, Siglos XIII-XV.}

\textit{Corregidores}

Monarchs found towns equally difficult to control. Those in Castile had long ago been given royal charters granting them autonomy. These \textit{fueros}, permitted their male citizens (\textit{vecinos}) to elect their own municipal councils.\footnote{Lunenfeld, pp. 1-23; Ruiz, pp. 110-138.} They could also send delegates to the Cortes, Castile’s representative assembly (the first in the Western world), where fiscal and administrative matters were discussed.\footnote{The Cortes predated by more than a century similar assemblies in England and France.} Towns thus enjoyed an advantageous position. As long as the kings were fighting the Moors, they were not in a position to interfere in urban affairs, since they needed the help of municipalities as well as the nobility. Monarchs were frequently obliged to grant even more independence to ensure loyalty during desperate times. This situation changed dramatically only after the conquest of Al-Andalus. The Crown could then turn to the centralization of power. (This policy was made even more urgent by the interference of the greatest nobles in city government. Some councils were almost entirely controlled by them.\footnote{Ruiz, p. 110.})

The Crown began by appointing judicial magistrates, \textit{alcaldes mayores}, to aid in the administration and help maintain royal authority. These were later joined by more powerful figures, the \textit{corregidores}.\footnote{The first mention of a \textit{corregidor}, the official charged with bringing towns under control, was in 1348, during the reign of Alfonso XI.} They were assigned to govern alongside local \textit{regidores} – hence “co-
"regidor", and were charged with curtailing concessions previously granted in *fueros*. From then until the advent of Ferdinand and Isabela, Castilian kings used them to protect royal interests, bring chaotic municipalities into order, and reduce the power of an always present urban aristocracy. The *corregidores* did not replace existing institutions; rather, they operated uneasily alongside them. In periods of royal weakness, municipal councils and aristocrats were able to bully them and reduce their effectiveness. But with a strong monarch *corregidores* could successfully enforce royal authority.

Despite their fluctuating power, *corregidores* were able to become rich and powerful through their offices (except of course when resistance from city councils and aristocrats became insurmountable). Monarchs then had to deal with complaints against those who used their position for graft. Sometimes these and other abuses triggered riots. This occasionally provided additional opportunities for aristocrats to enter local government.\(^{19}\) This in turn prompted the Crown to create yet another institution, the *residencia*, with investigative authority to keep *corregidores* in check.

Castile in the late fifteenth century was therefore an archipelago of cities and towns each with its own municipal authorities and regional aristocracies. Each municipality was its own little kingdom, where the “rich, the powerful and the privileged went their way, occasionally hindered but rarely humbled”.\(^{20}\) Much of Spain’s internecine conflicts began to be definitively suppressed only by the unprecedented assertion of royal authority under Isabella and Ferdinand.\(^{21}\) Although

\(^{19}\) Lunenfeld, pp. 16-18.

\(^{20}\) Ruiz, p. 193.

\(^{21}\) After the long reigns of Alfonso VIII of Castile (reign 1158-1214), Alfonso IX of Leon (reign 1188-1230), Ferdinand III of Castile (reign 1217-1252), and Alfonso X (reign 1252-1284), Castile did not see many competent and long-lived rulers. Instead, internecine struggles allowed cities and nobility to once again openly defy central authority, particularly during the minorities of several kings, and especially during the struggle that brought the Trastamara kings to power in the second half of the fourteenth century. The Trastamara dynasty had come to power after the illegitimate son of Alfonso XI, Henry II, killed his half-brother and legitimate king, Pedro the Cruel, in
the Catholic monarchs did not introduce many bureaucratic changes, they did bring an
unwavering commitment to make their presence felt throughout their kingdoms, and to ensure
challenges to royal authority were crushed. From the time of the War of the Castilian Succession
(1975-79), which secured the Crown for Isabella and Ferdinand, they successfully used
corregidores to strengthen their rule. They also reduced the number of municipal councils while
making sure they and the Cortes were unable to unite against them. Isabela La Católica was in
addition innovative in the use of the Inquisition and militant religious orders to destroy those
who opposed her. Finally, Ferdinand and Isabella were able to become more economically
independent through increased taxation on wool exports, and by tribute paid by Muslims and
Jews. Their military campaigns against Granada, which brought all of Iberia under Catholic
rule, further enhanced their prestige (and wealth).

Corregidores as a consequence became permanently powerful instruments of the Crown. At
the same time, they were brought under greater royal control. The monarchs understood
corregidores could not be left to their own devices. This was due not only to the danger of
corruption that could lead to the undermining of royal prestige, but also because without the
visible power of the Crown these officials could not enforce royal interests. In order to project
royal power throughout the country, the Catholic Monarchs, far more than their predecessors,
roamed the land, forging alliances, doing justice, and making sure all classes felt their

1366. Most of the Trastamara kings chose to delegate powers to their constables and dukes, most of whom were
hated throughout Castile. The House of Trastamara suffered from incompetent rulers, a pugnacious nobility, threats
from Muslim forces. Even after a relatively stable period of peace was established with the Muslims, the continuing
struggle for power between the Crown, urban elites and the high nobility went on for more than a century. It was
only at the end of this turmoil that Isabela and Ferdinand came to power in 1474.
22 Lunenfeld, pp. 24-52
23 Ruiz, pp. 127-131, provides a quick analysis of Royal sources of income.
24 So unsure were the monarchs of their authority even in this period, that Spain did not have a fixed capital.
Toledo, Avila, Burgos, Segovia, Valladolid, and even Seville all served as loci of the Castilian court at different
times. It was not until Phillip II moved the court from Valladolid to Madrid in 1561 that the country had a
permanent center
presence.\textsuperscript{25} There was also of course the need to affirm the monarchy’s commitment to justice and good government. All of this was used by Isabela to present herself and her officials as defenders of the people (while of course taxing them).

It was during this period too that the first step towards expansion outside Iberia was taken. The first object of conquest was the Canary Islands. The invasion had begun at the beginning of the fifteenth century when some nobles wanted the Islands’ dyes for their own textile manufacturing. For decades thereafter, Crown-backed nobles established military and economic outposts in the Canaries, following the pattern of the \textit{Reconquista}. The Crown contracted with nobles who were active warriors, as well as with others who were primarily investors in military expeditions. Those who led the campaigns acted as \textit{adelantados}, and were rewarded with the usual land and judicial office, as well as grants to establish sugar factories. They were also allowed to oversee the distribution of rewards to investors in Castile. In addition, they supervised both the collections of taxes owed to the Crown and the transfer of Castilians to the islands. Over time these newcomers began to encroach on the lands of the indigenous Guanche inhabitants.

The conquest was at first limited to the smaller islands. Later, the Crown became directly involved in a full-scale invasion of the larger islands of Grand Canaria and Tenerife. Its commanders were made \textit{gobernadores} (governors), similar to the old \textit{adelantado} (the term was Isabela’s invention.\textsuperscript{26}) In addition to the duties performed by the previous \textit{adelantados}, the Crown hoped they would become true (and honest) representatives of the monarchy.\textsuperscript{27} Instead, like other royal officials granted extensive administrative powers, they soon busied themselves getting rich.

\textsuperscript{25} Ruiz, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{26} Particularly in the New World, the office of gobernador replaced the office of adelantado, which, as mentioned above, slowly lost power and eventually turned into an honorific title.
\textsuperscript{27} Lunenfeld, p. 22
Shortly thereafter, the usual transition from conquest to consolidation followed. The Crown was at first able to enforce its interests in the islands and repress rebellions through the *gobernadores*. Then, as fighting slowly ended, Isabela sent *corregidores* to control governors who had become overly exploitative of the Guanches. However, distance and poor communications defeated her efforts, and *corregidores* eventually became equally abusive. Only direct royal intervention, it seemed, could end the abuses and corruption of recalcitrant officials. This was usually slow in coming. This is a history that would be repeated in the Americas.

In short, the unique circumstances of the Iberian Peninsula - the *Reconquista*, internal factional wars, and large and visible religious minorities - encouraged Castilian elites to develop an ethos based on war and military prowess, mostly directed against the Muslim enemy. The concessions the Crown had been forced to give to independent minded aristocrats and cities during its long struggle had made medieval Iberia a fractious and contested space. The Crown had never been at ease with its aristocracy or town elites, since it frequently faced challenges from them. It had needed military leaders to defeat Muslins, and it also had had to reward them. But these then used their wealth and influence to solidify their own positions in newly conquered regions, turning themselves into an even greater obstacle to the Crown’s desire for an orderly, tax-paying, and loyal kingdom. *Adelantados* and nobility alike had taken advantage of their positions to enrich themselves. It was only when peace and some sense of order had been achieved that monarchs could try to tame their own warrior elites.

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28 In some cases, governors were recalled and dismissed. Such was the case of Juan Rejon. Some, like Pedro Fernandez de Algaba, were even killed by other Castilians.
This had obliged them to raise up layer upon layer of royal officials. Although initially loyal to the Crown, as each became more independent and recalcitrant, a new group had to be created to bring the previous one under control. Being themselves appointed by the Crown, these officials were usually an imposition on the localities they were meant to govern, and seldom represented any desire for autonomy coming from the locals they administered. Exploitative of those below them, and antagonistic to those above, they were entirely self-serving, and ultimately disruptive.

The conquest and administration of the New World would witness an extension of these same relationships. The old model of adelantados would be used to grant governorships to those who were successful in the Americas. In addition, expeditions to explore and conquer parts of the Americas were modeled on earlier wars against the Moors, as soldiers of high rank and experience were encouraged to recruit their own armies, and go in search of riches, settling new towns along the way. The institution of the encomienda mirrored the arrangements of adelantados on the Muslim frontier, and the repartimientos in the Americas were similar to the ones after successful military campaigns in Iberia. The conquest of the New World was achieved by Spaniards who were then given titles and dominion at the expense of the conquered. It was a pattern that they had long become used to.

The model of New World administration thus owed much to the Reconquista and the centralization of power by the Castilian Crown, particularly during the sixteenth century. The Iberian Peninsula had witnessed the unfolding of a unique dynamic, born out of an identity based on military ethos and religious exceptionalism that found expression in the opposition of

29 Not coincidentally, one of the financiers of the conquest of the Grand Canaria, the Seville-based Florentine Juanoto Berardi, also helped pay for Columbus’ expeditions. Likewise, Americo Vespucci, the Florentine cosmographer and merchant who accompanied Columbus, worked for Berardi. Columbus himself was an adelantado
recalcitrant elites to the monarchy. These attitudes were later transferred to the Americas. The evolution of institutions of Spanish America was thus a replication of the painful centuries-long consolidation of power of the Castilian Crown.

3. The New Kingdom of Granada: *Encomienda*, the City and its Hinterland

The process of expansion and political centralization, transferred to the New World, created the Spanish colonial empire of Charles V and Phillip II. Just as during the *Reconquista* and invasion of the Canary Islands, the conquest of the Americas would not be financed exclusively by the monarchy. Most of it was done by private funding.\textsuperscript{30} Expeditions were contracted with *adelantados*, who were then granted the office of *gobernador*.\textsuperscript{31} Every conquest and looted treasure wetted the appetite of these *adelantados* and their armies of conquistadors for more, and drove them on to search for new kingdoms and riches. As an extension of the expeditions that conquered the Incas, and searched for “El Dorado,”\textsuperscript{32} Spaniards headed towards the eastern Andean highlands of present-day Colombia, where they found a temperate climate and fertile plateau. There they also discovered the Muisca culture, the most complex and densely populated pre-Columbian society of northern South America. Following a much-repeated pattern of


\textsuperscript{31} These included Columbus, Pizarro, Cortez and those who led expeditions in what would later be modern-day Colombia: Roberto de Bastidas (who accompanied Columbus on his second voyage), was given a grant to explore the northern coast of Colombia, where he founded Santa Marta (1525); Pedro de Heredia, who also explored the northern coast, where he founded Cartagena (1533); Sebastian de Belalcazar, who as part of Pizarro’s contingent founded Quito (1534), Cali (1536), and Popayan (1537); and former *gobernador* of Grand Canaria Pedro Fernandez de Lugo, whose lieutenant Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada founded Bogota (1538)

\textsuperscript{32} Literally “the Golden Man”. The legend came from tales of a Muisca ritual performed in Lake Guatavita, about 35 miles north of Bogota. A Muisca chief covered in gold dust bathed in the waters of the lake, while attendants offered artifacts made of gold and emeralds. Several attempts have been made since the sixteenth century to drain the lake, but only a few artifacts have been found. The area is now protected.
settlement, the Spanish defeated the Muisca, stole their gold, and established towns near populated areas. The most significant urban centers of New Granada - Bogota, Tunja, and Velez - were founded among the Muisca. Bogota and Tunja were later to become regional centers of power, with the former emerging as the colonial capital of the *Nuevo Reino de Granada* (New Kingdom of Granada), encompassing modern central Colombia.

The consolidation of the conquest then followed. While not exactly like the *Reconquista*, it was certainly inspired by the latter. After conquering the local population, *repartimientos* were distributed among conquistadors according to rank. The bringing of additional settlers from Iberia across the Atlantic remained, however, an insurmountable problem in the short term — and a very considerable one later on. In order to firmly establish their authority, the Castilians therefore had to adapt to local conditions. The solution, following the settling of towns, was the creation of the *encomienda*, the most important institution in the early colonies.

The Spanish exercised political and cultural hegemony through towns that were the seats of the legal bodies that governed the provinces. They were intended primarily to stabilize and regularize authority over the hinterland. As such, they were the foci of power and status, the centers from which the extraction of mineral wealth and farm production was organized and controlled (they also came in time to be centers of groups that did not exist in Spain, such as Indians, slaves, and Spaniards born in the colonies —creoles. ³³) Finally, towns radiated the cultural influences that created a Hispanicized New World. But unlike so many European towns, they never grew up organically as centers of artisanal manufacturing or trade. In this regard, they were artificial creations meant to serve administrative, not commercial, purposes.

It was the *encomienda*, however, that made the economic exploitation of the colonies possible. Since the primary purpose of the empire was profit, it was central to all other Spanish institutions and activities. During the early decades of empire, the *encomienda* allowed Spaniards who held them to exploit the labor of Indian populations that was ultimately the source of colonial wealth. It also provided them with the money and power necessary to remain at the pinnacle of society. Through the *encomienda* Spanish elites would even attempt to dominate the colonial administration by challenging royal officials whose functions were not always explicitly defined.34

Most importantly, the urban centers and the *encomienda* fixed the socioeconomic identity of the colonies in ways that continue to influence Latin American republics today. Both grew simultaneously, since one could not exist without the other. Then, as the *encomienda* started to decline due to the dramatic reduction of the native population, the *resguardo* appeared as an alternative method of governing the hinterland. But whether through *encomiendas* or *resguardos*, Spaniards maintained access to the labor and production of thousands of Indians scattered across the countryside. The *encomienda* first, and then the *resguardo*, in turn reinforced the position of the cities as centers of power and status.

Mirroring the developments in fourteenth and fifteenth century Castile, the initial stages of the conquest and consolidation had been determined by conquistadors without much peninsular intervention. This eventually changed when the Crown and the Council of the Indies started to assert royal authority through the creation of Viceroyalties, *audiencias*, and new *gobiernos* during the middle of the sixteenth century. This produced the inevitable conflicts between the

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local conquering elites and royal authority born out of the attempt of the Spanish Crown to create an orderly and well-governed colonial society.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{The Encomienda}

The \textit{encomienda} (literally: “to entrust”), bestowed in the form of grants, was the right to receive tribute and labor from Indians \textit{entrusted} to conquistadors in a specified area as a reward for service. Their size was dependent upon an individual’s position in the army. The recipient, the \textit{encomendero}, promised to pacify and protect the Indians, and supervise their conversion to Christianity. A parish priest was chosen by him to oversee the teaching of Christian doctrine. Tribute could take the form of agricultural produce, textiles, or labor.\textsuperscript{36} In order to ensure the efficiency of this rough and ready institution, \textit{encomenderos} relied on other Indians, called \textit{caciques}, who became central to the system. In the first years after the conquest, this office was filled by many of the old indigenous nobility, since their experience and prestige made it easier to induce Indians to work.

The \textit{encomienda} seemed a reasonable solution to many of the problems faced by the Spanish. The Muisca, like many of the sedentary, hierarchical tribes in the Americas, did not have the same attitudes towards work, land, and property as sixteenth century Europeans. They had never before worked for wages, nor did they own land as private property.\textsuperscript{37} Like other pre-

\textsuperscript{36} See Mercedes Lopez Rodriguez, “El Tiempo de Rezar y el Tiempo de Sembrar: El Trabajo Indígena como otra Practica de Cristianización en el Siglo XVI” (Time to Pray and Time to Farm: Indigenous Work as another Practice of Christianization in the 16th Century). In Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura, Volume 27 (Universidad Nacional Press, Bogota, Colombia, 2000)
Columbian peoples, their economic efforts were largely communal in nature, inspired and justified by religious rituals that were directed by the nobility and the tribe’s chief or priest. The religious justification for the entire system had been essential, since the chief/priest mediated between the community and the gods, gathering and redistributing production in the form of divine tribute. In addition, a system of mandatory labor already existed in some pre-Columbian societies, like the Inca mit’a (in Quechua), used in community-driven projects such as roads construction or communal farming. Because of the importance of the gold and silver flowing to Europe, the Spanish adopted the mit’a as a labor obligation. The mita was thus turned into a corvée system that required Indian communities in encomiendas to provide a percentage of their male population, called mitayos, for seasonal labor in mines, farms, or on public works, sometimes hundreds of miles away from their homes. They were also forced into all kinds of additional activities that kept the entire imperial system running. The encomienda and mita gave the Spaniards a means to consolidate their conquest and regulate the exploitation of the Indian population at little cost without entirely changing the pre-Columbian social hierarchy.

During the Reconquista, the Crown had offered victorious captains political office, privileges, and the right to extract tribute from rich Muslim and Jewish populations. Special privileges in addition had also been granted to those who wanted to establish towns near the ever-expanding frontier, thereby applying further pressure on the Muslim enemy. But Iberian lands were never as rich in natural resources as those in the New World and, unlike Muslim lands, were not immediately depopulated by their original inhabitants. The encomienda was thus

Coatsworth, pp. 256-261. The Indians did not contest the Spanish ownership of land, but rather their own exploitation as a workforce.
38 Friede, De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje, pp. 35-37.
39 The mita was mostly prevalent in Andean regions, since it had already existed in the Inca Empire — the Incan extensive road network was mostly built by mit’a workers. It was also indispensable for the exploitation of the silver mines of Potosí.
an adaptation of Castilian Reconquista institutions to the conditions of the New World. Rather than transferring populations (a largely impossible task), those already living on the land were reduced to a kind of serfdom. In the eyes of the Castilian monarchy, which strongly opposed using baptized natives as slaves, Indians were free vassals of the Crown and legal owners of the land on which they lived and worked. It was only their tribute that was the property of the Crown. At the same time, the monarchy needed to give something to its victorious captains, many of whom had invested heavily in financing the conquest and now expected generous rewards, without endangering paramount royal authority.

The encomienda answered both these problems. First, it gave a few hundred Spaniards the opportunity to control vast spaces and many thousands of Indians for their own benefit, to exploit their labor, and accumulate wealth. It also secured the Crown’s (at least theoretical) control of the conquistadors. Because the natives’ tribute was the property of the monarchy, Indians and their tribute were only temporarily “entrusted” to the conquerors. The encomienda obliged Spaniards to supervise the Indians’ conversion to Christianity, to respect their lands, and to refrain from enslaving them. In short, the Crown “authorized and taxed, but also protected. The conquerors pillaged and profited, but also governed”. All of this was designed to encourage Spaniards to continue to come to the New World, win power and status through conquest, and send vast amounts of wealth back to Europe. Belief in the morality of this system required a great deal of wishful thinking; less generous observers might have called it both odious and cynical.

40 Friede, De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje, pp. 35-37.
41 Coatsworth, p. 244.
The reality of the *encomienda* was of course much more brutal. Its legal structure, and the rights of *encomenderos*, which were never clearly defined, contributed greatly to the exploitation of the indigenous people.\(^4^3\) Some of this was the fault of the Crown. Being the absolute owner of the land, it had attempted to avoid the factional divisions that had emerged during the *Reconquista* by reserving the right to reclaim grants at will.\(^4^4\) Monarchs did not want to foster the growth of a powerful colonial feudal class similar to the one that had impeded royal power in Iberia, and which might openly defy their authority. As a result, the Crown always kept some *encomiendas* for itself, and imposed several other legal restrictions. Since *encomiendas* were rights to labor but not their land, they were not transferrable. Theoretically, Indians could not be bought, sold, or rented, nor could they be relocated. Moreover, the Crown prevented these grants from being inherited beyond the second generation.\(^4^5\) The *encomenderos* of New Granada were not as grand as those in Peru and Mexico, where *encomiendas* had many thousands of Indians. Nonetheless, the absence of a strong central authority that could enforce the law, and the fragmented geography of New Granada, allowed isolated *encomenderos* to use their Indians as they wished by ignoring royal restrictions with impunity.

The system encouraged *encomenderos* to mercilessly exploit natives by extracting as much labor and tribute as possible before their grants were either taken away or expired. This did not discourage other Spaniards from coming to the New World looking for *their* Indians with which to extract the wealth of the New World, rather than working themselves to produce it. The


\(^{4^4}\) Friede, *Descubrimiento del Nuevo Reino de Granada...*; see also Yeager, *Encomienda or Slavery?*, in general.

\(^{4^5}\) See Yeager, *Encomienda or Slavery?*, in general.
indigenous populations were in no position to withstand them. They had to work for their own subsistence, fulfill their tribute obligations, serve in encomenderos’ residences, mines, and farms, and pay tithes for the maintenance of the Church, duties Spaniards never had to fulfill. Moreover, encomenderos used their leverage to illegally demand still more from Indians “…with the approval of colonial officials, and with a repressive systemic logic that appeared normal [to Spaniards]”. In short, the entire colonial economy, and society’s very survival, depended almost entirely on Indian labor. There was very little to ease their burdens.

Gold mining areas were the sites of the greatest exploitation. Mining centers were nowhere near near Bogota and Tunja, but Spaniards living in these cities had considerable investments in them, and relocated mitayos were forced to work there. For example, Mariquita (founded 1551), located about 100 miles northeast of Bogota near the Magdalena River, controlled important mining centers, and saw extensive use of mitayos from the hinterland of Bogota and Tunja. The most important mining areas were located in the Popayan jurisdiction, which included Cartago, Buga, and Pasto (all modern-day Colombian towns). The need for labor encouraged encomenderos, gobernadores, and corregidores to shift and displace Indians at their pleasure. When this over worked, rapidly dwindling mitayo labor force proved insufficient, proximity to Cartagena and Panama allowed

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46 One of the very few advantages natives living in the highlands had was that European diseases did not thrive there. As a result, indigenous populations survived in higher proportions than those in the low lands. Spaniards never brought in many slaves into the Andes.
48 Salomon Kalmonovitz, La Economia de la Nueva Granada (The Economy of New Granada) (Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Bogota, Colombia, 2008), p. 34. For a detailed discussion of mining in Mariquita see Armando Moreno Sandoval, Minería y Sociedad en la Jurisdicción de Mariquita: Reales de Minas de Las Lajas y Santa Ana: 1543-1651 (Mining and Society in Mariquita Jurisdiction: Royal Mines in Las Lajas and Santa Ana: 1543-1651) (Universidad del Tolima, Ibagué, Colombia, 2006).
49 For an overview of Greater Quito’s gold mining at the turn of the 17th century, which also overlapped with New Granada jurisdictions, see Kris Lane, Quito, 1599: City and Colony in Transition (University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, NM, 2002), pp. 119-145.
Spaniards to import African slaves, particularly in low land mining areas, all with the permission of the Council of the Indies and the Crown.\textsuperscript{50}

Emerging as practically the only way to accumulate wealth in the first decades after the conquest, and resting on the military authority of the leaders of the expeditions who granted them, the distribution of \textit{encomiendas} was a source of great contention amongst Spaniards. Those who had come during the first wave of conquest benefitted the most, along with \textit{gobernadores}. These formed their own factions, carefully protecting their position against all who felt cheated, including new settlers who came asking for their own share of Indian labor, or “to be fed” in the parlance of the time.\textsuperscript{51} All were looking for natives to make themselves rich. Far from having anything to contribute, they were inherently parasitic, drawn by the gold rush, get rich quick atmosphere typical of economies based on mineral wealth rather than on creative entrepreneurship. In the conditions of the New World, the Castilian ethos of acquiring status and wealth through conquest and of despising manual labor was exacerbated.

Successive government attempts to enforce measures to protect the natives created additional Spanish discontent.\textsuperscript{52} Reforms had been prompted by pressure from peninsular intellectuals and priests such as Bartolome de Las Casas. They were fiercely resisted by \textit{encomienda} owners, who at the same time were fighting the efforts of royal officials to reduce the size of their grants. In this \textit{encomenderos} were eventually largely successful. Control was weakened by the corruption of the \textit{corregidores} and other royal officials whose tenures were long enough to allow them to join with powerful creole families, giving them incentives to

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\textsuperscript{50} The descendants of these African miners survive today in the Pacific coasts of Colombia and Ecuador. Their living conditions have not much improved since colonial times.

\textsuperscript{51} Friede, \textit{De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje}, p. 41. Translated from “Dar de comer”.

\textsuperscript{52} The “Civil War” in Peru between encomenderos is one of the best known.
despoil others by confiscating *encomiendas* around Bogota and Tunja for their own benefit and those of their friends. Even when the Crown wanted to punish transgressors, the process could take months. It eventually became clear that vigorous royal intervention to bring *encomenderos* under control had ironically encouraged them to extract as much tribute as they could as quickly as possible. Royal attempts to protect Indians had only made their condition worse.

In short, the attempt to centralize royal power in fourteenth and fifteenth century Castile was largely replicated in the New World. The Crown sent officials to rein in the power of an increasingly quasi-feudal colonial elite, while at the same time attempting to strengthen the colonial bureaucracy. Yet the Crown soon saw many of its agents slip from its control. It is only at this point that the process began to deviate from the Iberian experience. The Spanish Crown could not afford to lose control of the colonies, and the elites there enjoyed the distinct advantage of being far from the metropole. Since the monarchy could do very little to get at them, it relented in its effort to reduce the *encomiendas*, eventually allowing the institution to operate outside strict royal control. At a time when the peninsular aristocracy was being subdued, a colonial elite was being allowed to become entrenched.

Then, just as the *encomienda* had become institutionalized as a “fundamental tool to dictate relationships between Indians and settlers”, the Indian population began to decline so drastically it could no longer perform the obligations imposed on it. As a result, the *encomienda* started to decline as the economic mainstay of empire. Unbowed by royal pressure, it was defeated by demographics. This process was accompanied by the rise of a class of free individuals of mixed race (*mestizos*) and ambiguous status who were not bound by the same

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53 Friede, *Descubrimiento del Nuevo Reino de Granada*, Ch. VIII. As a result, Indians could sometimes have several owners at once.

54 Friede, *De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje*, p. 41.
labor and tribute obligations as natives, and who would gradually come to make up a considerable proportion of the colonial population.

In order to prevent the tribute paying population from disappearing altogether, the authorities were forced to remake encomiendas, eliminate unproductive ones, and transfer the surviving natives into Indian reserves, or “resguardos”, as they were known in New Granada. Most encomiendas eventually fell under the direct administration of the Crown. But even as the encomienda was being slowly replaced, it had already cemented the institutionalized subordination of all economic activities to a hierarchy of privileged people whose position was based on conquest and coercion. \(^5\) It was inevitable therefore that the resguardo soon approximated the same old conditions of exploitation and abuse.

Resguardos slowly evolved into proper Indian towns, with institutions that mirrored those of Spanish origin. At the same time, they struggled to maintain a clear demarcation between Spaniards and the rest — a Republica de Indios as opposed to a Republica de Españoles envisioned by the Crown. Before examining the rise of this new arrangement, however, it is essential to examine key features of the original colonial urban centers.

4. Urbanization: The Spanish Colonial Model

The encomienda was the main instrument for the accumulation of wealth, but it was the colonial cities that were the real bases from which Spanish cultural and political influence spread. The Spanish vision of urbanization was derived from several historic models, including the Greek agro-urban community or polis; the Roman civilizing civitas; the Augustinian vision

\(^5\) Fernando Guillen Martinez, El Poder Político en Colombia (Political Power in Colombia) (Editorial Planeta, Bogota, Colombia, 1996), p. 82; Kalmonovitz, pp. 35-47. The encomienda would survive until well into the 18th century, but mostly as a status symbol.
of the City of God; and the urban settlements that were either taken from Muslims, or established on the frontiers of Christian Spain during the seven-century-long Reconquista.56 These were supposed to be centers whose influence would acculturate their inhabitants, and those in the surrounding countryside, to Spanish Catholic civilization. This method, originally designed to transform the identity of Iberian populations, was then transferred to the Americas.57 “The urban unit was a microcosm of a larger imperial and ecclesiastical order, and responsibility for its proper functioning lay not with private consciences but with the discretion of bureaucratic, latifundary, and ecclesiastical notables”.58 This was fundamental in defining the nature of urbanization in the first two centuries throughout Spanish America. It was also through cities that the monarchy outlined territorial jurisdiction and boundaries; controlled the pacification, acculturation, and religious conversion of the native population; and supervised the economic management of the colonies.

Urbanization was a highly effective means of control. A town did not have to be big; it just needed to have certain necessary elements (none of which were of an economic nature) — a governor, a cabildo (town council), vecinos (citizens), encomiendas, and of course, a surrounding Indian population. The cabildo was established first, created by the highest ranking conquistadors, and was the institution in charge of jurisdicitional matters, designation of lots and parcels, economic and infrastructure management, and assignment of expeditions to explore and conquer new territories.59 Given that cities were to be the most important foci of military and

58 Morse, p. 71.
59 For a detailed description of Bogota in its early years (1538-1545), see Mejia Pavony, La Ciudad de Los Conquistadores.
economic control, many members of the elite did not permanently establish residence in only one, and towns functioned as way stations for restless Spaniards, just as during the Reconquista. Thus, many of the conquistadors who founded Bogota did not stay; instead, a significant number moved on to start other towns, as well as to establish mining operations deep in the countryside.\textsuperscript{60} Regardless, the cities of Spanish America, their governors and their cabildos were the main centers for administration, even if it was only with time that cities came to include many permanent residents.\textsuperscript{61} “It was the town upon which the Spanish Crown and colonizers alike depended for establishing jurisdictional legitimation, organization of the economy, and perhaps most importantly defense of trading routes, commercial exchange, and protection of frontier regions.”\textsuperscript{62} In practice, Spanish colonial towns resembled “North American counties more than cities,”\textsuperscript{63} since they lay claim to tens or even hundreds of miles of territory around them with dozens of encomiendas and mitas.

Encomenderos had originally occupied the important offices in municipal administrations.\textsuperscript{64} Since the competition for Indian labor and resources that caused deep divisions and conflicts amongst Spaniards were adjudicated in the towns, the first decades of colonization placed cities in a terribly vulnerable position. The dispute between Almagro and Pizarro over jurisdiction of Cuzco and the Indian labor that surrounded it is well known, and resulted in what almost became a minor civil war against the Crown in the 1540s. There were additional conflicts between Jimenez de Quesada, Federman and Belalcazar, all of whom had led the conquest of modern day

\textsuperscript{60} Mejia Pavony, pp. 285-295.
\textsuperscript{61} For immigration and citizenship in Spanish America see Tamar Herzog, Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2003). Given that the debate over citizenship and immigration policy became a matter of contention between cities and the Council of the Indies, or immigrants versus the cabildos (rather than city versus city/hinterland), this subject will not be explored here.
\textsuperscript{62} Kinsbruner, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, pp. 35-36; see also Lane, Quito, 1599; Mejia Pavony, La Ciudad de Los Conquistadores, in general.
Colombia and Ecuador. Once royal officials were sent to the New Kingdom of Granada, ostensibly to rein in the power of encomenderos, they too began to compete for labor for their own profit, generating still more strife between the original settlers and the Crown.65

As mentioned above, the conquest was consolidated and towns originally created without royal intervention. By the middle of the sixteenth century, however, peninsular authorities had begun to exert greater control with the creations of Audiencias. While conflicts between Crown and local elites never entirely abated, Audiencias at least defined each city’s jurisdiction over its hinterland in a clear and precise way. The city-hinterland relationship was further rationalized by the proclaimed official primacy of the urban center.66 It was for this reason that the vice regal capitals of Mexico City and Lima occupied the highest place in the colonies. These were the homes of the most important colonial officials, and administrative and ecclesiastical offices. The vice royalties were then subdivided into Audiencias: New Spain included the Audiencias of Mexico, Havana, Santo Domingo, Guatemala, Guadalajara, and even Manila in the Philippines; the Viceroyalty of Peru included the audiencias of Santa Fe (Bogota), Quito, Panama, Charcas (La Plata), and Concepcion (Chile). These were further divided into gobiernos such as Guayaquil, Popayan, Cartagena, and Tunja, which were in turn broken up into corregimientos. Each of these possessed a cabildo. Every settlement, town, or village in the Spanish colonial empire was thus subordinate to a city in the following order: vice-regal capital -> audiencia -> gobierno -> corregimiento. The royal Cedula (decree) of 1549 carefully defining Bogota as the

65 See Friede, Descubrimiento del Nuevo Reino de Granada, for conflicts in Bogota
66 For details on how Bogota emerged as the capital of the Audiencia de Santa Fe, or Kingdom of New Granada, Mejia Pavony, pp. 146-159
audiencia of Santa Fe (and capital of New Granada) eleven years after its founding, was typical of the way both the city’s administrative area, and duties of its royal officials, were delineated:67

In Santa Fé de Bogotá in the New Kingdom of Granada shall reside another royal audiencia and chancery, with a president, governor and captain general….. (and) will have for districts the provinces … of Santa Marta, Río de San Juan, and of Popayan, except those places of the latter which are marked for the royal audiencia of Quito; and of Guyana, or El Dorado, it shall have (all that) is not in the audiencia of Hispaniola, and all the province of Cartagena; sharing borders on the south with said audiencia of Quito and any undiscovered lands, on the west and north with the North Sea and the provinces which belong to the royal audiencia of Hispaniola, on the west with the one of Tierra Firme (Panama). And we order that the governor and captain general of said provinces and president of their royal audiencia, … (assign) the repartimiento of Indians and other offices that need to be appointed, and attend to all the matters and business that belong to the government, and that the oidores (judges) of said audiencia do not interfere with this, and (see that all) matters of justice provided for and sentenced (are) carried out.68

The fact that most of the cities and mining centers defined in this and similar cedulas had already been created decades before the decrees suggests that conflicts between cities for natives and resources were prevalent until the audiencias established distinct jurisdictions. It should also be noted, however, that the farther away a town was from its directing superior city, the more autonomy it had. The case of Popayan is particularly revealing, since it was located near important gold fields. Standing between Bogota and Quito, its elites developed a testy relationship with both audiencia capitals (Popayan’s rivalry with Bogota would last until well into the nineteenth century, when Cali surpassed it in importance.69)

Any new exploration or economic development within its jurisdictional boundaries had to first be approved by the city. The authority of the encomienda-dominated cabildos and their

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67 A Cédula Real was a decree issued by the Spanish King to resolve jurisdictional and other legal matters in the colonies.
68 Recopilación de las Leyes de Indias, 1680. Libro II, Título XV: De las Audiencias y Cancillerías Reales de las Indias.
69 Popayan had access to such mining wealth that even its nunneries had gold mining slaves: Lane, pp. 79-82.
influence over their hinterlands was thus undermined by the audiencia officials and colonial authorities, who were outside of the town council. The most important of these were the newly appointed governors who ruled entire provinces (and who were sometimes called audiencia presidents). As a result, the granting of land, the division of Indian labor between encomiendas and mitas, and the late sixteenth century reorganization of encomiendas into resguardos, was largely done by the audiencia presidents following the advice of oidores and visitadores, who supervised settlers and their activities in the colonies. The latter were similar to Castilian residencia officials - agents appointed by the Crown to supervise corregidores. The authority of audiencia governors was naturally much stronger in the audiencia capitals, where they and other colonial administrators lived. The fact that cabildo officers would eventually come from creole families, while colonial officials continued to come from Spain, created an important source of tension between the two powerful groups.

5. Resguardos

Old World diseases, relentless exploitation, and displacement of the native population eventually threatened to create a demographic catastrophe. Already by the 1560s the numbers of indigenous people in many areas were too small to sustain the burdens placed on them. Since they were the primary generators of wealth, something had to be done. The Crown, which had only timidly interfered with encomiendas, now felt the need to impose its rule more forcefully. As a result, the audiencias intervened and reorganized the countryside by dismantling

70 Kinsbruner, p. 34; for the first decades of Bogota’s administration and its conflicts between provincial and city institutions see Mejia Pavony, pp. 160-181
71 Mejia Pavony, p. 296.
unproductive *encomiendas*, relocating the Indian population, and organizing them in new *resguardos* (or *reduciones*, literally reductions) in order to “protect” them. These were proper Indian towns over which *corregidores* were assigned.\(^{72}\) They were at least theoretically supposed to copy the organization of Spanish urban centers. The main towns were called *cabeceras* (literally, the head towns), with all other *pueblos* (towns) being subject to it.\(^{73}\) Indians were thus brought into a more controlled environment forbidden to all non-Indian groups, but from which labor and tribute could continue to be extracted, and the *mitayo* demands of mining centers satisfied. The Crown assumed control of *resguardos* and tribute, always reserving the right to assign and remove land from them.

In theory, the natives enjoyed the usufruct of the land on which they lived, but could never own it (because of this they would eventually lose it). This was a major change from their earlier status as landowning quasi-serfs. They now had as little claim to the soil as their former *encomienda* exploiters. While land use was restricted to Indians, they were not permitted to rent, lease, or sell it, since this was deemed a threat to their ability to produce. *Caciques* and Indian officials in charge of *resguardos* were responsible for managing collective tribute and labor obligations demanded by the elites and colonial administration.\(^{74}\) Just as on the *encomiendas*, Indians could only use the land of the *resguardos* for two purposes: to produce tribute for the Spaniards and the Church, and to sustain themselves. They were never allowed to engage in

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\(^{73}\) This municipal hierarchy still survives today, not only in Colombia, but in Latin America in general.

commercial agriculture. Precisely because the *resguardo* kept the tribute and labor systems in place, the institution did little to protect Indian populations from continuing abuses and encroachments. Moreover, Indians and *caciques* ignored the official rules and proceeded to rent out portions of *resguardo* lands to *mestizos* and Spaniards in order to shift part of their tributary burdens to renters. These were then allowed to live among Indians in *resguardos* without punishment.\(^75\)

The system at first had greatly strengthened the position of the *caciques*, who, as mentioned above, had been the legal mediators between Spaniards and natives living in *encomiendas*. It had been a relationship that had worked well for them and their families, since they were exempted from the obligation of lower status Indians. They used their position to achieve wealth and influence within their communities (there are several examples of wealthy *cacique* families surviving well into the seventeenth century.\(^76\)) *Caciques* were often even more exploitative than Spaniards.\(^77\) However, Indian towns eventually saw the creation of municipal institutions similar to those of their Spanish counterparts, such as *cabildos* and *alcaldes* (mayors), and even the emergence of Indian *vecinos* who could vote in *cabildo* meetings. In the highly competitive Spanish empire, Indian *cabildos*, once established, began to struggle for tribute and labor with the *caciques*, and eventually won.

These in turn began to be superseded by *audiencias* and sundry colonial officials. Most important among them were *corregidores*. The Crown had intended to use them to replace *encomenderos* as rulers of the hinterland. They were the newest group of bureaucrats intended to oversee the orderly urbanization of the indigenous peoples. The Indian *cabildos*, while enjoying

\(^{75}\) Friede, *De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje*, pp. 54-56.

\(^{76}\) For Quito see Lane, pp. 89-95; for all of Spanish America, see Gibson, *Indian Societies under Spanish Rule*, in general. Both provide an overview of Spanish American Indian municipal dynamics.

\(^{77}\) Gibson, pp. 399-401.
control over most matters within their communities, had previously been subordinate to
encamenderos and priests. Now they were under the supervision of corregidores, who by law
were supposed to protect them, but who, along with encamenderos, priests, (and later
landowners and free mestizos), began to exploit them in their turn.\(^78\)

The implementation of the resguardos continued the process that had begun with the
encomienda of subordinating the hinterland to urban political centers. Central to this was the
conversion of the natives to Catholicism, for it is through religion that “the Spaniards made their
most determined effort to modify Indian society.”\(^79\) Conversions were at first in the hands of
encamenderos and their descendants who possessed legal power to dispatch missionaries, and
were obliged to pay for the services of a priest. This meant giving clergy their “fair” share of
Indian labor and tribute so that their enterprise would be properly funded. Spanish clergy were
then sent to live amongst the local people, first on encomiendas, and then in resguardos during
the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

This process was initiated by and enforced from the cities, where the most powerful elites
lived. The encomiendas and resguardos merely served as functional centers for local clergy and
rural officials. “For the Spanish, the acculturation of Indians meant to impose on them an order,
´ponerlos en policia´ (to police them) … while for the Spanish, the city, civitas, was the nucleus
of civilization… where law, order, and morality blossomed.”\(^80\) Pacification and acculturation
went hand in hand with conversion. In fact, without conversion to Spanish Catholicism, it is
doubtful that any Indian community would have enjoyed any peace at all.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., pp. 388-392.
\(^{79}\) Ibid., p. 395.
\(^{80}\) David J. Weber, Barbaros: Los Españoles y sus Salvajes en la Era de la Ilustracion (Barbarians: Spaniards and
their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment). Trans. Chaparro A. and Noriega L. (Editorial Critica, S.L., Barcelona,
There was no better way to indoctrinate natives than to introduce patron saints into their communities. A patron saint’s feast day was cause for great celebration. Led by their clergy, many towns used these festivals competitively to show their greater religiosity than their neighbors, hoping in this way to gain the favor of the powerful city based bishops. It became axiomatic that the nearer Indians were to a major city, the more easily they were Hispanicized. Those who emigrated to cities lost their pre-Colombian cultural and religious practices much faster than those in outlying areas.

Whether the Crown favored peaceful or military strategies, Spanish encomenderos, landowners, and miners, benefited from “just war” since it provided them cheap labor through Indian captives and slaves; raids against small non-pacified Indian tribes were prevalent throughout the entire colonial period. In the Audiencia of Bogota these tribes populated pockets of resistance in the highlands, but there were large sections of unpacified areas that required large investments in missions and expeditions from the main urban centers. In fact, given the vast amounts of land claimed by cities, there were areas of cultural and violent resistance that continued to be a thorn to Spanish settlers up until Republican years, and many peripheral encomiendas and resguardos were the source of multiple reports of obstinate Indians who refused to accept the “true” religion. (There was strong historical precedent for this.

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81 Gibson, p. 397.
83 These usually came from societies that did not have complex hierarchical structures. While the Audiencias of Quito and Bogota never had to deal with a threat similar to that of the Araucanos of Chile, the Pampa Indians in Paraguay and Argentina, or the Apaches in northern New Spain, the Paez and Pijaos tribes were an important nuisance in the southern parts of the Central and Western highlands, and the upper reaches of the Magdalena and Cauca rivers. To the North, several Indian tribes in the Guajira peninsula defied Spanish colonization through engaging in contraband with Dutch and English traders. In fact, throughout the colonial era Guajiro Indians stole cattle from Spaniards and captured slaves from rival Indian tribes, selling both to English traders for weapons and supplies. The Guajiros were never truly subjected to Spanish rule, and several missions and expeditions were sent from Bogota, Pamplona, Cartagena, and Santa Marta, without success. Efforts to subdue them were only relevant in the late 18th century. The lowland districts east of Bogota and west of Popayan were all areas with coveted resources claimed by their respective Jurisdictions, but that the Spanish struggled to consolidate. As for slaves, in the rare
Christian conversions in the late Roman Empire had been more easily achieved in cities. Traditional beliefs had survived far longer in the countryside, far away from the main urban centers, as they later did in *encomiendas* and *resguardos*. The pejorative term “pagan” is after all simply Latin for a country dweller.)

The process of Christianization, supervised by bishops and *audiencia* officials in Bogota, also facilitated economic exploitation, and especially the running of the mines that were always the main source of colonial wealth. The chief concern of the *audiencia* was that Indians pay their tribute and provide labor for the Crown, *resguardos* and *encomiendas*. The bishops’ main desire was that they pay tithes and sustain clergy with food and labor. The local elites simply wanted them to work in the fields and mines. “The Christianization of the native communities was (therefore) understood not (merely) as the adoption of new beliefs, but rather as the imposition of a new discipline, familial networks, and systems of production, all of which forced (indigenous people) to fulfil their obligations despite laws protecting them, in the midst of a population demise caused by constant migration to urban centers, increasing “*mestizaje*”, and most crucially, death due to exploitation and diseases”.  

As long as the urban elites residing in cities were satisfied with the wealth flowing to them (as well as the *quinto* demanded by the Crown), abuses in the hinterland were of no great concern.

At the same time, there was a curious tension at the heart of the Spanish colonial empire, and which was almost entirely foreign to the British colonies of North America. Unlike the Protestant settler colonies of the north, the Spanish never consciously aimed at

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84 Lopez Rodriguez, p. 67
pushing the indigenous inhabitants aside. They needed their labor to work in the mines. Protestant dissenters in New England and elsewhere wanted to clear the land so they could work it themselves. The notion of coming to the New World to actually work, as opposed to getting rich at the expense of Indian labor, was something largely unknown to immigrants to the Spanish imperium. Once it was established that indigenous labor was a necessary component to getting rich, their pacification through religious conversion became of prime importance. The cynicism of this was tempered by the sincere religious convictions and commitment of Catholic missionaries. As one modern author has noted, “there was a central tension within the logic of the Spanish imperium: how to guarantee a sufficient labor force for the colonial economy and yet protect as well as Christianize the native population.”

Still, there was considerable corruption and exploitation even within the missionary effort. Part of this was the result of jurisdictional competing claims. Parishes had been created for ecclesiastical purposes, but they did not always coincide with the jurisdictions of *corregimientos* and *encomiendas*. As a result Indian communities were sometimes obliged to provide tribute and labor twice over, in addition to supporting their own communities. Other abuses were more sinister. Where priests were actually available, they frequently requested land from urban *cabildos* and *audiencias*, depending on who had authority over which district. Since they did not always have legal access to Indian labor, they often forced women and children to work for them. Another notable example of corruption was the use of the *cofradia* (sodality), religious confraternities that financed and managed “chapels,

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85 Kinsbruner, p. 24
86 Gibson, p. 389.
87 Lopez Rodriguez, p. 31. It is remarkable that even today there are competing religious processions in many rural towns, along with the usual processions associated with the cult of the Virgin Mary.
masses, festivals and charities, as well as land and other properties of the church.” These sodalities were supported by Indian members of the community, but in many cases, became sources of embezzlement for *corregidores* and priests with the complicity of Indian *cabildos*. Where missionaries and priests were lacking, *encomenderos* and royal officials would even send their own minions to pass as clergy in order to collect tithes for themselves. Bishops were unable to do much about this, given their lack of manpower.

Whether through the *encomienda* or *resguardo*, it seemed that Spanish colonial rule was only capable of producing successive layers of parasitical and predatory officials that the monarchy was unable to control. Royal authority could be much more easily exercised in Iberia. Following Charles V’s crushing of urban rebellions in the War of the Communes (1520-1521), the Crown had remained firmly in control of its vassals and officials. But royal power, separated from the colonies by the broad expanse of the Atlantic, remained both distant and weak. Since it was unthinkable that the monarch would send an army to the New World to make war on his own subjects (especially when they were successfully managing what were still enormous numbers of indigenous inhabitants), there was little Charles, his son Philip II, or their successors, could do. Royal intervention for the protection of Indians was therefore sporadic, and being clearly unsuccessful, ultimately insincere. As long as the Habsburgs received the *quinto* (the fifth of all mine output) that allowed them to fight the Ottomans or Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire and the Netherlands, they were willing to allow colonists and their own corrupt officials to run the empire as they wished.

*From Resguardo to Hacienda*

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88 Gibson, p. 398.
89 See Lopez Rodriguez, *El Tiempo de Rezar y el Tiempo de Sembrar*, in general.
When natives were put in *resguardos*, their displacement left many plots of land “abandoned.” Spanish elites that had previously never been allowed to own land outside of their towns of residence now jumped at the opportunity to acquire this newly available ground. They then went even further, pressuring *visitadores* and *corregidores* to consolidate *resguardos* further in order to open up more land for sale (not coincidentally, this began at a time when Indians had begun to try to defend themselves against encroachments). Grants of temporary ownership were first given through contracts called “*mercedes*” (mercies), by which the Crown temporarily ceded title as long as it was used productively. However, with the tributary population declining, and poor whites and *mestizos* petitioning to own land themselves, the elites hastened to use their influence to claim most *mercedes*, while subsequently using their position to use the land any way they wished. Threatened by the near disappearance of free labor, the elites cajoled the *audiencia* to sell them title to legal ownership of *mercedes* without the confirmation of the Crown in contracts called *composiciones* (compositions). All those who occupied land and claimed it as their own were prompted to pay a “*composicion*” before a colonial judge, to be then confirmed by the Audiencia. Since only the elites had direct access to colonial officials, *audiencias* and *gobiernos mercedes* and *composiciones* were decided in their favor, bypassing poor Spaniards, mestizos, and Indians still hoping to keep their lands. In this

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90 Mejia Pavony, p. 175, provides a rough map of Bogota’s surrounding *resguardos* and *encomiendas* between 1560 and 1627. Remarkably, many of them have survived up to today as rural towns, or as extended neighborhoods of Bogota’s metropolitan area.
91 Mejia Pavony, pp. 170-171.
92 Friede, *De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje*, pp. 54-56; Gonzalez, p. 182.
93 Friede, *De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje*, pp. 53-57. Confirmation of the *composicion*, rather than the price, remained the biggest problem for non-elites. During the 18th century, the Bourbon monarchy sent agents to curtail these abuses, but their efforts were mostly futile.
94 “Micro-*encomiendas*” make their appearance around this time, particularly near Bogota and Tunja. These were formed by one, two, or three Indians who had lost their bond with their community or *resguardo*. These *micro-encomienda* Indians frequently lived in their masters’ houses or haciendas as domestic servants or farming labor. It was a clear sign of the rising power of hacienda owner. Friede, *De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje*, p. 51
way, the greater part of the ground around resguardos was taken by the audiencia on behalf of the Crown, and then slowly given to the new hacienda elite. Even more remarkably, land occupied by poor Spaniards and mestizos eventually ended up inside the mercedes and composiciones.

Unable to influence the institutional machinery, most mestizos and poor Spaniards were then forced to renegotiate their position with the new landowners, becoming either renters, or, if unable to do so, workers on the new haciendas. Those small-scale farmers who tried to hold on found they could not compete with the great estates. They were ultimately forced to sell their land and move to the towns, or else become farm laborers. In attempting to protect Indians, the monarchy had only reinforced their economic submission by depriving them of the soil. All royal good intentions were defeated by rapacious creole elites and corrupt officials. And since the Crown had never recognized the Indians’ right to own resguardo land, they received no compensation when it was assigned or sold to others.

Ultimately, the Crown’s attempts to alleviate abuses of the Indian population proved futile. Its efforts to separate the white Spanish population from the indigenous population proved equally unsuccessful.95 This was because of the appearance of a new group - the mestizos. These had been made inevitable by Spanish colonial policy. Emigration to the colonies from the beginning had been severely restricted. Only Castilians had been allowed to enter, since those from southern Spain had been considered tainted by possible Jewish or Moorish blood. Since those willing to embark on New World adventures were almost invariably young men, the inevitable mixed-race children began to appear soon after their arrival (it is estimated that out of

95 For efforts to reduce the forced movement due to the Spaniards’ appetite for tribute and labor, see Herzog, pp. 61-62.
55,000 immigrants to the New Granada from 1493 to 1600, only 18.4% were women).\textsuperscript{96} Since pre-Columbian societies had long been used to the concubines that surrounded elite males, the sexual subordination of women to men of higher social status was nothing new to indigenous people.\textsuperscript{97} In colonial society their offspring would always carry the stigma of illegitimacy. But they also lacked a clear place within the older established social hierarchy. This was the source of their relative freedom.

All of this contributed to a remarkable and fundamental transformation of economic relationships. This was the rise of a new free holding, land owning elite that had practically been unknown during the first century of Spanish America. The \textit{hacienda} now became the most important economic unit in the colonies. While the \textit{encomienda} continued to provide its owners prestige but little else, \textit{hacienda} owners expanded their holdings and solidified their position as the political and economic elite with the energy and aggressiveness of the new rich. Many of them used their profits to invest in mining ventures and slaves to work them, just as \textit{encomenderos} had done earlier. This new class of landowners now also offered \textit{mestizos} the opportunity to work for wages, thus creating a new class of low wage laborers free from tribute obligations. An earlier, quasi-manorial system, with a warrior land-holding elite dependent on serf labor, was giving way to a modern, land-\textit{owning} class employing free labor that was no longer bound to the land, or obligated to provide corvee labor in the


\textsuperscript{97} Marta Zambrano, “Ilegitimidad, Cruce de Sangres, y Desigualdad: Dilemas del Porvernir en Santa Fe Colonial” (Ilegitimacy, Race Mixing, and Inequality: Dilemmas of the Future in Colonial Santa fe [Bogota]). In Botcher, H, and Torres H. (Eds.) \textit{El Peso de la Sangre; Limpios, Mestizos y Nobles en el Mundo Hispanico} (The Weight of Blood: Pures, Mestizos, and Nobles in the Hispanic World) (El Colegio de Mexico, Centro de Estudios Historicos, Mexico City, 2011): 269-275
mines and fields. These dynamics resulted in the blurring of the rigid lines created by Spaniards to keep an ordered society.

Yet despite all this, the perennial subordination of rural areas to the cities was perpetuated.\textsuperscript{98} With \textit{mercedes} and \textit{composiciones}, the elites had successfully maintained the status quo, strengthening their position within the social hierarchy. More importantly, they compensated themselves for the loss of their legal claim to tributary labor in \textit{encomiendas} and \textit{resguardos} by the ruthless coercion of royal bureaucrats to acquire legal control of most of the land, now worked by a subordinated class of wage workers. Whereas before status and power were defined by the ability to access unpaid labor, they were now defined by ownership of \textit{haciendas} worked by poorly paid farm hands, while manual labor continued to be despised as the burden of the lower classes. Although natives and \textit{mestizos} desperate to escape exploitation began to drift to the \textit{haciendas} and towns, the land continued to be dominated by a privileged minority who lived in the major urban centers; workers could barely command a decent wage or own much land themselves. Most importantly, many Indians still had to provide labor for colonial elites and Church institutions. The successive changes brought by the \textit{encomienda}, the \textit{resguardo}, and the growing \textit{haciendas}, only continued to “accelerate the natives’ social and racial disintegration”, and the subordination of the countryside to the towns.\textsuperscript{99}

6. \textbf{Legacies of Extraction and Inequality}

\textsuperscript{98} Friede, \textit{De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje}, pp. 52-56
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 59
As we have seen, the conquest and consolidation of Spanish America unfolded through the implementation of institutions that emphasized the privileged status of Spaniards, while placing the native population in a position of institutional and socioeconomic inferiority. With ruthless efficiency, the Spanish had adapted to the environment of the New World by taking advantage of the specific pre-Columbian social hierarchies and institutions of sedentary and agriculturally based populations that had focused for centuries on the collection of tribute through communal labor. This explains why the Spaniards ruled such large populations with ease, while more nomadic tribes were more difficult to conquer.100 Most of these populations resided in the lowland valleys. In 1570, Bogota was home to around 600 adult male Spaniards, supported by around 40,000 male tribute payers, and Tunja had around 200 Spanish male settlers surrounded by more than 50,000 male tribute payers; Velez, another important town 130 miles north of Bogota, had about the same numbers as Tunja.101 The Spaniards attempted to establish two separate communities, a “Republica de Españoles” and a “Republica de Indios” through the creation of encomiendas and resguardos. In the first century of colonial rule, this division became fixed.

It is in this period too that urban settlements founded by conquistadors cemented their status as the most important foci of power in the colonies. They were created solely as administrative centers to control the native population. Only the necessity to communicate with other colonies or with Europe forced the colonizers to create ports such as Cartagena and Santa Marta. Almost no city in New Granada was founded with a commercial purpose. The Magdalena River was the only passable route into the interior of the colony, but the only important settlements on the river

100 The most famous were the Mapuche tribe in Chile and Argentina, who the Spanish were never able to conquer. In New Granada, there were the Paez and Pijao Indians, who gave the Spaniards plenty of headaches until they were finally subdued.
were Honda (1539), which served as a way-station between Bogota and Cartagena (which was worked by *encomienda* Indians), and Mompos (1539), which did have an active clay and goldsmith industry, but which was too far from the main urban centers in the highlands to be of major importance.\(^\text{102}\) Towns were first and foremost centers of power, where peninsular and creole elites lived, and from which mining and agriculture were directed.

The *encomienda* was for a time the only means to amass wealth. It also gave *encomenderos* the ability to impose their will on other sectors of society. They invested in gold and emerald mines, helped form *cabildos* and established the institutions that both governed the colony and supported the clergy and bureaucrats that administered it.\(^\text{103}\) *Encomenderos* controlled resource allocation, the distribution of town lots and the assignment of Indians according to their and their friends’ needs, funded new expeditions to further expand the empire, and supervised the priests assigned to convert the local population. Political power was centered where Spaniards established the most prominent *encomiendas*, that is, around Bogota and Tunja.\(^\text{104}\) These became the most important centers of colonial society in New Granada. In 1553, when the Pope made Bogota a Metropolitan Bishopric through the influence of its *encomenderos*,\(^\text{105}\) the city also became the religious as well as political and economic capital of the country.

While the *encomienda* allowed *encomenderos* to become a privileged class, it also subordinated the institutions of the hinterland to them, because the status and power of the former depended on the exploitation of the latter. As previously mentioned, the power of the *encomenderos* had only been defeated by the decline suffered by the natives as a result of diseases and displacements, not by the attempts of the Crown to protect them, nor by any

\(^{102}\) As of 2017, the *first ever* road to connect Mompos with the rest of the country by land was being constructed. Until it is completed, the only way to communicate with the town is by boat

\(^{103}\) Colmenares, pp. 287-294

\(^{104}\) Guillen Martinez, pp. 101-109

\(^{105}\) Ibid. p. 102
challenge from them to have a more elevated status. Yet once the *encomienda* started to decline, and the number of free *mestizos* and other mixed-race groups increased, the evolution of a more inclusive and egalitarian society was prevented by the creation of the *resguardos*. In order to “protect” the Indians, they were placed in *resguardos*, Indian towns where Spaniards were theoretically not allowed to live.\(^{106}\) This reorganization gave religious authorities the ability to engage with native communities more effectively, thus acculturating them more easily. At the same time, the formation of *resguardos* freed up land previously occupied by inefficient and abandoned *encomiendas*, opening the way for a new rural institution that benefited privileged Spaniards, the *hacienda*.

The *encomienda* and *resguardo* institutions established a rigid hierarchy of privilege and patronage—their most crucial elements—that determined the extent to which all sectors of colonial society accessed wealth. During the first decades, as Spaniards began to settle areas where “dense and docile populations (could) provide food and labor”,\(^{107}\) *encomenderos* solidified their *political* power by extending their patronage to every colonial institution and economic activity. Thus, at the top of society were *encomenderos*, both big and small,\(^{108}\) a privileged class that did not work, but instead enjoyed the *usufruct* of the work of Indians. The latter were at the bottom of society. They were expected to work and sustain the entire colonial establishment. Their institutional status resembled that of children, incapable of making independent decisions and dependent upon the patronage, direction and protection of their masters. No one’s wealth came from the private ownership of land or individual


\(^{107}\) Stafford and Palacios, p. 35.

\(^{108}\) In 1564 the average number of natives assigned to *encomiendas* ranged anywhere between 60 to 908. Twenty *encomenderos* (24% of the total) had claim to 51% percent of the tributary Indian population in the Tunja Province. Friede, *De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje*, pp. 46-48.
entrepreneurship, which would have created a more balanced economy, and which might have allowed different sectors to counterbalance the influence of the conquistador descended elite. There could be no bourgeoisie in the Marxist sense, because no one owned the means of production, which in this traditional society was land. All land remained entirely in the hands of the Crown, (or more precisely, in the hands of Indians who were wards of the state. After the creation of the resguardos, even this was no longer true.) Instead, wealth in New Granada was accumulated by receiving labor, tribute, and tithes produced by the Indians. Even encomenderos were (at least theoretically) vulnerable, since they could lose their rights to Indian labor at any time. This would only change with the evolution of the hacienda.

Filling the gap between a small number of wealthy Spaniards and thousands of natives were those Spaniards, caciques, and later mestizos who could not claim encomiendas. Forced to work under an encomendero’s patronage, they formed part of his retinue, or worked as colonial bureaucrats in his pay.\(^{109}\) As for new settlers, or those hoping to strike out on their own, the necessary incentives to become entrepreneurs were absent. Instead, they followed the model established by their predecessors. They set out to find fresh Indian populations to exploit on new encomiendas, or else find new gold mines and then petition the urban elites to provide them Indians to work as mitayos. Either way, subordination to the authority of encomenderos and complicity in their activities was necessary to survive in colonial society.\(^{110}\) Unless a Spaniard was able to establish himself as an endomendero (never an easy task), or be part of an encomendero’s retinue, he ran the risk of being marginalized. As the encomienda spread throughout New Granada, reinforcing its position as the dominant force in society, economic

\(^{109}\) Guillen Martinez, pp. 78-83 Here are included the caciques, parish priests, encomienda captains and administrators, those who received land or mining grants from encomenderos, and urban bureaucracy

\(^{110}\) Ibid., p. 86
opportunities were both distinctly narrow and linked to those with access to Indians, while economic exclusion and institutional marginalization became increasingly difficult to escape.

The later reorganization of the native population into resguardos and the subsequent opening of land-owning opportunities simply continued older patterns of exploitation, although different in form. Rather than moving to the countryside to work and manage their land, the new landowning elite continued to live in cities as absent landlords. They had to, if they wanted to be sure that colonial officials would continue to work for their interests. As a result, the old system of subordination remained. The Crown continued to own the resguardos, so tribute and labor obligations remained constant. Hacienda owners offered wages to free mestizos, mulattos and Indians able to escape from resguardos, but in doing so, they established themselves as the new “protectors and benefactors” of those who worked for them. The slow rise of the hacienda throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thus continued to perpetuate the subordinate status of the majority to the few.

There remained no practical equivalence between the institutions that governed cities (Republica de Españoles), and those that governed the hinterland (Republica de Indios). The institutions present in Bogota, Velez, Popayan, or Tunja functioned to protect the privileges of Spaniards. Those in the countryside worked to reinforce a colonial hierarchy of privilege and exploitation. The natives never contested the right of Spaniards to exact labor and tribute from them, since this continued pre-Columbian practices. However, their complaints about the amount of tribute rates and the hardships they suffered were rarely heard and amended.111 A remarkably pernicious pattern continued to develop: laws were enacted but were not enforced -unless they favored the elites. In other words, “la ley se obedece pero no se cumple” – that is, the law is

111 Lopez Rodriguez, El Tiempo de Rezar y el Tiempo de Sembrar, describes several examples of these abuses.
obeyed, but not complied with (It remains so in modern Columbia.) Whenever they could, Spaniards pretended to obey the law, even claiming to be too powerless to be abusive, but in the end did not comply.\textsuperscript{112} When priests accused \textit{encomenderos} of excessive exploitation the latter replied with accusations of their own, but no institution served to contain the power of the elites, or to protect the most vulnerable members of society.\textsuperscript{113} The life of rural towns was thus characterized by institutional coercion and social subordination. This prompted many Indians and \textit{mestizos} to resort to all kinds of trickery to evade persecution or oppression, or else to escape to the relative anonymity of urban centers.

7. The Complexity of Socio-racial Categories and Status

One of the most important legacies of Spanish colonial rule in New Granada, which also supported the subordination of the countryside to the political power of the towns, was the complicated racial caste system structured around a concept of “Spanishness”. Spanish Catholics had become obsessed with bloodlines long before their arrival in the Americas. Their original religious antipathy to Muslims and Jews, combined with the fear of secret dissenters among them after the formal expulsions of 1492, led to the association of religious belief with ancestry. This was codified in the so-called \textit{limpieza de sangre}, or purity of blood laws. In the days before any understanding of genetics, religion was believed to be carried in the blood. Being truly Spanish was dependent on whether one was a new (i.e. recently converted) or an old Christian –and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid, p.43.]
\item[112] Just to mention a few examples: priests were accused of forcing Indians to pay for the sacraments, such as marriage and baptism, and for the appropriation of their property; priests in turn accused \textit{encomenderos} of placing churches too far from Indian homes, thus forcing them to spend too much time travelling, which led to their being punished for not having enough time to fulfil their obligations. Crown officials in their turn were accused of appropriating the funds allocated to pay priests in the Crown’s \textit{encomiendas}. See Lopez Rodriguez, \textit{El Tiempo de Rezar y el Tiempo de Sembrar}, in general.
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\end{footnotesize}
“new” was now seen as problematical.\textsuperscript{114} (The rules of admission to the later Jesuit order, created by a Spaniard, would raise these concerns to a mania. No one with any Jewish ancestry was allowed.) While religion was certainly important in Spanish America, the additional notion of “Spanishness” in the New World resulted in all kinds of privileges or liabilities deriving from ancestry. To be “Spanish” meant to be free of any tribute or labor obligations, while only Spaniards could be a “vecino” (citizen) of any town (except of course Indian towns), be part of its council, or hold office of any kind within the colonial administration or the Church. In addition, only Spaniards could hold encomiendas, own urban property, or receive native tribute. To be classified as “Indio”, on the other hand, meant one was part of a community that was obliged to pay tribute, work the land, and remain barred from any kind of office except within an Indian community.\textsuperscript{115} To be Indian or to be Spanish was thus central to one’s status.

Despite all efforts to separate Indians and Spanish in order to preserve the purity of Spanish blood, the legal walls between the different races proved quite permeable. This was true in both urban and rural settings, and contributed to the slow ending of the system of encomienda and resquardo-based serfdom. No longer bound to the land, many Indians and their mixed-race offspring began to migrate to the largest cities. Many Indian women found work as domestic servants there. Many other men and women supported themselves as casual laborers or peddlers.\textsuperscript{116} There were also a small number of African slaves bought by the richest Spaniards to domestic servants. Others eventually became artisans, or even administrators.

In addition, there was a great deal of racial “confusion” in the countryside. Indians routinely seeking to escape the rigid controls in their locality headed towards other resguardos to work as

\textsuperscript{114} For a discussion of “purity” in New Granada during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the origins of this concept, see Zambrano, \textit{Ilegitimidad, Cruce de Sangres, y Desigualdad}, \textsuperscript{115} Herzog, pp. 62-63. \textsuperscript{116} Friede, \textit{De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje}, pp. 60-61.
artisans, or officials. Many, having escaped from the control of their caciques, were able to self-identify as mestizos, thus freeing themselves from paying tribute.\textsuperscript{117} Resguardos and encomiendas saw many such individuals enter their precincts in this way. Most difficult to displace were those mestizos whose mothers already lived in the resguardos. In addition, despite the efforts of the government to preserve the division between the Republica de Indios and the Republica de Españoles, poor Spaniards, mestizos, and mulattos began to live amongst Indians in greater numbers, taking the opportunity to gain control of Indian lands on encomiendas and near resguardo towns. Native women continued to have children with these “new” settlers outside of marriage, thereby increasing the number of rural inhabitants of mixed origins with remarkable speed. It was in the midst of this racial mixing that colonial administrators struggled valiantly to define what it meant to be Spanish, mestizo, mulatto, or Indian.

Racial divisiveness contributed to other kinds of social divisions as well. Spaniards did not merely discriminate against everyone else. They also turned on each other. The original conquistadors made a clear distinction between themselves and new arrivals.\textsuperscript{118} During the late colonial period an equally clear line was drawn between Iberian Spaniards and American born creoles. Indians and those of Indian descent also learned how to turn against each other for personal advantage. The pre-Colombian Indian nobility took advantage of their previous position to negotiate a favorable status within the colonial hierarchy, while decades later the explosive growth of mestizos allowed them to abuse Indians in encomiendas and resguardos. Their

\textsuperscript{117} Herzog pp. 61-62  
\textsuperscript{118} James Lockhart, “Social Organization and Social Change in Colonial Spanish America”. In Bethell, L. (Ed.) The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume II: Colonial Latin America (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1984): 303. This was also done to Spaniards from regions other than Castile and Andalusia
encroachment on Indian lands was one of the main causes of the decline of Indian communities during the late colonial period.\textsuperscript{119}

At the same time, there were clear signs that racial categories were social constructs that could be manipulated at will. Thus, the children of Indian nobility were frequently identified as “mestizo” when it came to tribute obligations, demonstrating that race did not only define status, but status could also determine “race.”\textsuperscript{120} More tellingly, the sons of conquistadors born of Indian women fought next to their fathers and were largely recognized as equals -even if produced outside the bounds of Christian marriage.\textsuperscript{121} In 1567 alone at least 13 mestizo men travelled to Spain with their fathers to establish connections with their paternal families, returning to New Granada some time before 1570.\textsuperscript{122} It is evident that this first generation of mestizos was able to assimilate into Spanish society, and was treated appropriately by their conquistador fathers and peers.

This “privileged” mestizo status began to disappear after the first generation. The labor of categorizing the population as Indio, mulatto, mestizo, or Spanish would later become an important task during the visitas, (“visits”) of Crown officials in the colony throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (They would also become ever more imaginative in inventing labels for people who continued through generations to have children with people racially different from themselves.) Census officials visited every encomienda and resguardo and interviewed every male and their families to determine tribute and labor obligations. By the

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 298
\textsuperscript{121} Alvarez Morales, pp. 65-72. One of the most famous native women in Spanish American folklore is “Malinche”, partner of Hernan Cortez during the conquest of the Aztec empire.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, p. 71.
seventeenth century, mestizos, although already numerous, were still legally forbidden to live in Indian towns. But since many mestizos born in encomiendas and resguardos had close blood ties with Indians, this was difficult to enforce. The visitas were designed to root out these individuals deemed “disruptive” of Indian communities. The main reason of all this was of course to maintain the profitability of the encomienda or resguardo.

The absurdity of the entire enterprise was highlighted by the whimsical way in which individuals were sometimes characterized. There was one reported case of a self-identified mulatto who had lived in a resguardo all his life, but whose children were categorized as Indians simply for tribute purposes. There are other cases in which women who had been categorized as “Indian” petitioned to be re-identified as mestizo because they had been vindictively categorized as Indians. If successful, and some were, their children would not be subject to the tribute and labor obligations of Indios.  

It also seems clear that the closer a mixed-race child was to its Spanish father, the closer he or she was to being categorized as “mestizo”, or, if fortunate enough, as Spanish. But the closer the child was to its Indian, or even mestizo mother, the closer he or she was to being branded as an “Indian”. The presumed illegitimacy of mestizo children certainly undermined their position, but it was still better than being burdened with all the obligations of an indio. It was these grotesque categorizations the defined the destiny of the inhabitants of Spanish colonial society.

In cities categorizations tended to be broader since social relationships were more complicated than in the resguardos and encomiendas. For one thing, more people of mixed

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123 For these examples, and others, see Rappaport, Letramiento y Mestizaje en el Nuevo Reino de Granada, Siglos XVI y XVII, and Alvarez Morales, Mestizos y Mestizajes en la Colonia, in general.
124 Zambrano, p. 269.
125 See Rappaport, Letramiento y Mestizaje en el Nuevo Reino de Granada, Siglos XVI y XVII, and Alvarez Morales, Mestizos y Mestizajes en la Colonia, in general.
126 See Morse, The Urban Development of Colonial Spanish America, for a discussion on the evolution of urban centers in colonial Spanish America.
race were “born of legitimate marriages in which both parents were themselves in mixed
categories”. Mulattos, the illegitimate children of Spanish men and domestic servants, were
most prevalent in those communities where slavery was critical, such as mining centers and the
Caribbean port of Cartagena, but they nonetheless had a presence in the central highlands of New
Granada as well. Urban centers also continuously received Indian, mestizo and mulatto migrants.
As mentioned above, many Indians lived in the main urban centers as domestic and servants,
while increasing numbers of mestizos and mulattos came in to fill intermediate artisanal roles
between the elites and the Indians. As Indians continued to decrease, the role of maids, street
peddlers, neighborhood store owners, and domestic servants also started to be filled by mestizos.
In general, while Indians, mestizos and mulattos were able to find more economic opportunities
in cities, as evidenced by the property mentioned in their wills, and were able to navigate the
social structure by escaping from the countryside, their choices were still determined by
socioeconomic conditions. While different in nature than in the hinterland, the institutional and
social marginalization of non-Spanish groups was clearly present in cities, giving origin to
concepts such as “gente decente” (decent people) for people of standing, and “plebe” and
“chusma” for the rest.

As Spanish elites continued to struggle to protect their position by insisting on racial
classifications, certain behaviors were assumed to be characteristic of each group. Indians were
at first considered to be docile and ripe for Christianization. One of the key assumptions in the
creation of the resguardos was that the negative forces agitating and disaffecting indigenous
people were coming from outside. Blacks, for example, were initially assumed to pose the

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127 Lockhart, p. 197.
Testamentos de los Siglos XVI y XVII” (Indigenous Families of Santa Fe, New Kingdom of Granada, according to
16th and 17th Century Wills). In Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura, Volume 39, No. 1
biggest danger to Indian communities, due to their associations with alcohol and pagan customs. The resguardo was supposed to keep the Indians docile, thus preserving them to continue fulfilling their obligations. Yet, as the latter started to become unbearable, some either resisted or simply escaped their communities. Spaniards then started to re-categorize them during the seventeenth century as lazy, incorrigible, and incapable of civilization. By the eighteenth century they were frankly regarded as stupid.\textsuperscript{129} Throughout the colonial period, and well into the Republican era, the status of “Indian” was informed by prejudices associated with their socioeconomic condition and their relationship to the elites.

Similarly, the mestizo population started to be regarded in strongly negative ways. Given that sexual relations between Spanish men and women of other groups almost never took place within marriage, the connotation of illegitimacy was very closely linked to the meaning of “mestizo”.\textsuperscript{130} They were also considered troublemakers, and most of the prohibitions against groups living among Indians were targeted at them.\textsuperscript{131} (It must be admitted that they did not help themselves by their abusive treatment of Indians in resguardos, encomiendas, and even in urban centers, since their status gave them institutional superiority over natives.) These problems only became more pressing as their numbers continued to grow. Ironically, them being the group most closely “related” to the Spanish, made it more necessary in the opinion of the elites to strengthen (at least juridically) the distinctions between them and Europeans. Being mostly illegitimate children, they could by law not be part of a Spaniard’s family, nor could they inherit any property from their father. They were thus forced to seek generous patrons, develop artisanal skills, or try to acquire land from encomiendas and resguardos (ultimately unsuccessfully, as

\textsuperscript{129} Gonzalez, p. 178; Friede, \textit{De la Encomienda Indiana a la Propiedad Territorial y su Influencia Sobre el Mestizaje}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{130} Zambrano, pp.269-275; Alvarez Morales, pp. 85-87.
\textsuperscript{131} Alvarez Morales, pp. 80-95.
explained above). As was common in Europe, Spaniards drew clear lines between their legitimate and their “natural” children. That most of the latter came from relationships with Indians, slaves, and later women of mixed race only made that distinction more obvious in the New World than in the Old.

A famous case in colonial New Granada dealing with ethnic identity and status pointedly reveals how racial categorization helped cement elite privilege. This concerns Don Diego de Torres, the product of a union between a Spanish conquistador and the sister of an Indian cacique.132 Diego had lost a legal battle in the late sixteenth century for a cacique position in an encomienda near Bogota against his half-brother, Pedro de Torres, the legitimate son of their father and a Spanish woman. Despite being born outside of marriage, Diego had been recognized by his father, was educated by Spanish friars, and lived among the Spanish elite in Tunja and Bogota. He even had the resources to travel to Madrid, where he married a Spanish woman. Diego had been able to find allies and favorable testimonies from some Crown officials in New Granada because he had opposed some of the abuses of encomenderos. While never denying his mestizo origin, he claimed that his Spanishness would allow him to keep other mestizos, who he characterized as dangerous and vicious, away from the encomienda. He implied in this way that his Spanishness redeemed his Indian blood. However, even though Diego was considered Spanish enough by his allies, he lost the fight, and the encomienda position was assigned to agents of encomenderos allied with his half-brother. The colonial courts had decided in favor of Pedro de Torres because he had argued that Diego’s condition as a mestizo was in fact a threat to the social hierarchy dominated by Spaniards. Implicit in Pedro’s argument was a fear that an illegitimate and literate mestizo such as Don Diego Torres could, with institutional

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132 Diego was given the prefix “Don”, reserved to men of noble status. His case, among others, is discussed in Rappaport, Letramiento y Mestizaje en el Nuevo Reino de Granada, Siglos XVI y XVII, and Zambrano, Ilegitimidad, Cruce de Sangres, y Desigualdad.
empowerment, pit other *mestizos* against the colonial elite and dangerously disrupt the entire social balance.\(^{133}\)

The case reveals not only the importance that the European elite placed on racial classification, but also, remarkably, the juridical artificiality of such distinctions. Racial categories were in fact so fluid at times that the identification of a specific group in one locality might not apply in others. Likewise, socioracial status might be adjusted depending on individual perceptions and legal vagaries -two litigants could define racial identity from two opposing perspectives. The assignation of individuals to a particular category largely depended on how those of higher status were affected.\(^{134}\) A person could be Spanish, *mestizo*, or even Indian -even if they truly weren’t. Because of all of this, maintaining a rigid social hierarchy based on race turned into an institutional nightmare. But while Spanishness and “*mestizaje*” was an ambiguous and institutionally ambivalent situation for everyone who wasn’t Spanish, it is undeniable that socio-racial constructions attributed negative attributes to non-Spanish groups. These prejudices were translated most powerfully into marginalization and institutional vulnerability, and later into the outright racial discrimination that became increasingly evident throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

8. **Life under the Republic**

The fundamental problems of colonial Latin American society did not end with the creation of independent republics in the early nineteenth century. Colombia might have gained independence from Spain in 1819 after Simon Bolivar’s decisive victory at the Battle of Boyaca on August 7\(^{\text{th}}\), but the new republic continued to be plagued by severe socioeconomic

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\(^{133}\) These dangers were corroborated by testimonies from other *encomenderos*, bishops, and other colonial elites.

\(^{134}\) Nowadays, Colombian society in general still retains many aspects of these colonial attitudes. Recognizing their origin is an important first step in addressing socioeconomic based inequalities.
inequalities and institutional weakness. Consequently, it has repeatedly fallen into disorder, the result of numerous, disastrous civil wars, especially during the nineteenth century. Even today, the supposedly democratic institutions that govern the nation have largely failed the vast majority of the population, due to rampant corruption and the selfishness of the elites. This is due almost entirely to the country’s colonial legacy.

The *hacienda* owners had supplanted *encomenderos* in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but this had done little to change the fundamental dynamics of the society. The royal road to power and wealth in New Granada continued to be the ability of the elites to sway governmental institutions to work for their own narrow interests. By the end of the colonial period, the vast majority of the population had been subordinated to the patronage of powerful urban elites with enormous landholdings in the countryside. Urban centers under the Republic continued to be the foci of political power. Most of the former *audiencia* and *gobierno* capitals had simply become the provincial capitals of the new nation. Their status remained intact thanks to the elites who continued to live there. This creole elite had been the main organizers of the struggle for independence, and as a result, the republic largely belonged to them. Once victorious, they had been able to shape the institutional structure of the new nation. While most of the Colombian “Founding Fathers” were either trained as lawyers or military men very comfortable with Enlightenment rhetoric, the actual source of their wealth and status came almost exclusively from traditional, inherited family holdings (a condition not dissimilar to that of many of the founders of the North American republic.135) Their heads might have been full of notions of republican virtue, but their feet of clay remained the legacy of brutal colonial exploitation that had left them at the top of society.

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135 Camilo Torres, for example, studied in Bogota but his family held land around Popayan and Neiva. And the family of Francisco de Paula Santander, second in command to Simon Bolivar, owned extensive sugar and cocoa plantations near Cucuta.
They were equally unable to escape the quarrels that had characterized Colombian elites through the colonial period. Retaining access to political power was essential for individuals in this group, since it was the only way to ensure economic success. This resulted in constant bitter factional disputes. When Bogota was chosen as the national capital, thanks to the political acumen of its residents, elites in the provinces were determined to resist control coming from the center. This resulted in a division between Centralists and Federalists. It later evolved into conflicts between so-called Conservatives and Liberals. Emboldened by the isolation of their landholdings, Colombia’s difficult topography, and the support of the hundreds of laboring families subordinated to their patronage, provincial elites repeatedly rebelled against the central government. After the death of Simon Bolivar in 1830 and the dissolution of the Gran Colombia (of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela), civil wars erupted in 1839-41, 1851, 1854, 1860-62, 1876-77, 1884-85, 1895, and 1899-1902. This does not take into account frequent secessionist threats from Panama—a separation that was made successful in 1903 because of United States support. During the Federalist period (1863-1886), there were dozens of conflicts between regional elites, who without major interference from the central government felt free to increase their power at the expense of their neighbors with the use of their own provincial armies. These struggles for power and wealth, although disguised by rhetorical devices, were essentially a mirror image of the conflicts between conquistadors, encomenderos and royal agents during the colonial period. The tide of victories thus swung endlessly back and forth between Liberals and Conservatives in battles that were largely devoid of any real ideological content. Yet every success on one side only added to the bitterness of the other, resulting in new rebellions as soon as the winning party showed signs of weakness.
Colombia therefore never suffered from typical urban versus rural, or industrial versus agrarian conflict, since the elite factions did not differ much in terms of their economic holdings or social policies. If there was any difference between them during the nineteenth century, it was between the Federalist (Liberal) and Centralist (Conservative) position about the role of the Church in education and politics. This was supported by the Conservatives and resisted by the Liberals.

Above all of this there was the office of the president. That was the greatest prize for which both factions longed. Thanks to the influence of Bolivar, who saw the need for a strong central executive power to govern the weak countries he had liberated, it had become the most prestigious and powerful position in Colombia, almost akin to that of a monarch. In a country where hacienda owners pursued their own partisan provincial interests, the president, being the single most important source of patronage, was almost uniquely able to create and command a national network of parasitic but loyal subordinates. The term cacique thus took on a new meaning. In colonial times, this had been an Indian who was able to mediate between the Spanish and the indigenous population. It now came to signify a partisan regional agent. Every Colombian president maintained a network of caciques in all the towns, which in turn distributed important offices and public money, thereby maintaining the local supremacy of his own party. The opposition (whatever that was at the moment) maintained its own network. In this way, the nation alternated between Centralist and Federalist governments, and later between Conservative and Liberal regimes. These changes were always preceded by civil wars. There was never any sense of a national community that might work honestly for peaceful, democratic

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136 Colombian Liberal and Conservative parties had their origins in the 1820s conflict between supporters of Simon Bolivar (and the so-called Centralists), and Francisco de Paula Santander (leader of the Federalists).

137 Dario Mesa, “La Vida Política Después de Panamá” (Political Life after Panama), in Mutis Duran, S. (Ed.) Manual de Historia de Colombia, Volumen 3 (Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, Bogota, Colombia, 1982): 169
transitions of power. Most people never identified with anything beyond their own patron’s interests, and the hope that his victory might bring them some small benefits. Whatever the precipitating reason for the conflict, every struggle was ultimately about who was going to have control of the national patronage network that could provide even greater power and wealth.

The Colombian elites had no ability to compromise, because unlike North American politics, there was nothing to compromise about. There were hardly any ideological differences, except about religion, and politics operated in the realm of absolutes. One side had national power, and hence access to enormous wealth, or it did not (it is instructive to note that when United States politics reached a similar impasse in 1860, the result was most murderous war in the Western world in the entire nineteenth century.) The fragmented nature of the country’s political life, combined with its rugged geography, the absence of efficient institutions outside the main urban centers, and the lack of creative economic entrepreneurship, all contributed to a profound national disunity that has kept the country in a constant state of institutional and socioeconomic underdevelopment.

When the Federalists gained power in the 1860s, they rebuilt the country’s institutions in order to strengthen their position by making their supporters rich. Among the first things they did was expropriate the lands of the Church, then the country’s largest landowner, and also an ally of their Conservative opponents. Only partially compensated, Church lands and buildings in the various provinces were sold to those who were supposed to be the highest bidders. In an almost exact repetition of the acquisition of resguardo and encomienda lands by the hacienda elite, only major city-dwelling landowners friendly with the government were able to gain control of most

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138 This was a tactic well known in Europe since the time of the expropriation of the monasteries during the Reformation, when Protestant rulers won the support of their nobles with the distribution of land. French revolutionaries did the same thing, albeit for different ideological reasons, in the 1790s. Orthodox Church lands went the same way during the 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

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Thus, governance in rural areas under supposedly Liberal anti-clericals continued the patterns of the colonial era. Elite rhetoric might change over the centuries, but their actual practice remained constant. As for the countryside, regional authority was supposed to emanate from the provincial capitals. In fact, these towns only served as headquarters for agents of the central government sent to rule the hinterland.

Then, in 1884 another civil war broke out between the factions, resulting in a Conservatives victory. This was followed by a new 1886 Constitution which further centralized power in Bogota, eliminated federalism, and restored the position of the Church as an important political as well as social institution. A Concordat then followed, giving the Church control of the country’s education system (and in effect making it an important part of the Conservative patronage network).

The collusion of wealthy city dwellers with the government might appear to be some variety of the much-maligned modern-day crony capitalism. That would be profoundly wrong. Crony capitalism can be the use that innovative entrepreneurs make of government connections to advance their businesses. This was not true in Colombia because for a very long time there were no creative capitalist elites. Colonial wealth had originally been largely derived from mining (and mine labor) given to conquistadors as rewards for military prowess. This was loot, and had nothing to do with genuine entrepreneurship. The distribution of farmland (which was worked in very traditional ways) was similarly the result of grants acquired through bureaucratic favoritism. Haciendas were won through connivance, and not earned in any real economic sense.

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139 Guillen Martinez, pp. 388-392
140 For an overview of the Concordat, see Fernan E. Gonzalez Gonzalez, “El Concordato de 1887: Los Antecedentes, las Negociaciones, y el Contenido del Tratado con la Santa Sede” (The Concordat of 1887: Background, Negotiations, and Content of the Treaty with the Holy See). In Credencial de Historia No. 41 (Banco de la Republica, Bogota, Colombia, 1993). Web. December 5th, 2017
The difference between this and genuine entrepreneurship free of corrupt government ties is highlighted by the remarkable development of the so-called Colonización Antioqueña (Antioquian Colonization), which began in the late eighteenth century and extended well into the twentieth. Here is one area where the local economy successfully escaped the dead weight of political cronyism, and the detrimental legacy of exploitation and inequality that Spanish colonial rule left in Colombia. It is here that small landowners coming from the central and western highlands created hundreds of towns in the region that today comprises Colombia’s “coffee belt”.¹⁴¹ Their achievement turned out to be one of the most influential cultural, social, and economic events in the nation’s history. This is because the development of the coffee industry, indispensable to the nation throughout the twentieth century, also nurtured entrepreneurs who helped the country’s industrial development. Key to all this was the region’s almost complete absence of colonial institutions and geographic isolation, which left it free from the upheavals of the late colonial and republican decades, as well as the exploitation of the encomienda and resguardos.

The region of colonial Antioquia had been largely emptied of its native inhabitants soon after the arrival of the Spanish because of disease, displacement and war. The encomiendas given to Spaniards there therefore rapidly disappeared, and the surviving remnant of the indigenous population was quickly absorbed as mitayo labor. Without a local native population to exploit, the regional towns focused on limited mining operations. By the eighteenth century, Antioquia had become one of the poorest regions in New Granada, as well as one of the biggest importers of African slaves. While the elites of Bogota, Tunja, and Popayan used the political machinery to

¹⁴¹ The colonización Antioqueña by settlers unconnected from the landowning political elites operating through their own individual initiative is unique in post-independence Spanish America. It strongly resembles the colonization of the western United States during the nineteenth century.
become the legal owners of large haciendas elsewhere, the focus in Antioquia was on its mines. Without an Indian population, the countryside was largely unworked. Because the elites of Antioquia did not possess the same resources to acquire status, political power, and wealth as their counterparts in other parts of New Granada, they were also unable to prevent the entry through the late eighteenth century of many outsiders - “wildcat” independent miners of different racial origins who poured into the region. This created a society of self-employed miner-prospectors who could focus on “attending to his and his family’s needs, (while) receiving a higher income than elite mine owners could have offered.”

This group of adventurers was soon joined by large numbers of others who came to the region following the example of the miners, but who now focused on acquiring land and working it themselves. This was possible because centuries of isolation and desolation had prevented the formation of a parasitical elite, so common elsewhere, which could have prevented the development of independent small-scale landowning. Even parish priests, who in the areas around Bogota and Tunja served as the agents of hacienda owners, turned into community leaders who helped protect the rights of their parishioners.

The first settlements were founded by settlers devoted to the raising of their families, and who actively participated in the functioning of local institutions. More importantly, this grass roots commitment to community was indispensable in defending their rights from the few traditional landowners in the region. “These immigrant families, committed to reap the rewards of their own work, had a great sense of egalitarianism, cooperation, and communal participation, which prevented the formation of large latifundial holdings (which would have been worthless without tributary labor to work it), creating the possibility of the emergence of a rural middle

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142 Guillen Martinez, p. 147. Spanish whites, mestizos, and even mulattos formed part of this group.
143 Ibid, p. 379.
class already evident by 1800. Since family landholdings were insufficient to provide for all the children, thousands were forced to leave their places of origin to search for land of their own, thereby facilitating the creation of new towns similar to those that their fathers had created, all characterized by closely-knit communities in good rapport with their parish priests, and pooling labor resources to acquire and clear the land cooperatively. Settlers travelled south and west of Medellin to found hundreds of small towns between the upper Magdalena and Cauca river valleys. The modern provinces of Caldas, Quindio, Risaralda, northern Tolima, and northern Valle del Cauca were all populated by this Colonización Antioqueña.

Still, this was hardly an egalitarian utopia. The socio-racial stigmas prevalent in New Granada were still present in the new communities. There were large numbers of mestizos and mulattos among the immigrants. While many were able to get some land, the majority of landowners were white. Despite the necessity of maintaining strong communities, social distinctions remained important, and the non-white population was unable to escape negative stereotypes that existed everywhere in New Granada. Yet, rather than forming a subordinated laboring class, most non-whites formed their own groups of miners and traders. More importantly they eventually developed a quasi-monopoly in the transport of goods using pack animals, a service that was indispensable in connecting and supplying burgeoning new communities.

Despite all its flaws, the pattern of settlement during the Colonización Antioqueña stands in marked contrast with that of colonial rule elsewhere in New Granada. Settlers had founded hundreds of new towns populated not by parasitical elites looking to control unfree labor, but by

144 Ibid, p. 150.
145 This is the origin of the “arriero”, muleteer, famous in Colombia for transporting agricultural products as they made their way through the treacherous regional topography. The fictional character Juan Valdez, created in 1958, is the symbol of the archetypal coffee muleteer.
small landowners who worked their own land. In the absence of a hacienda elite, the communities of the Colonizacion Antioqueña were able to maintain institutional autonomy away from the main urban centers, and to build a kind of participatory democracy that allocated land and enforced the law with a degree of inclusiveness not seen anywhere else in Colombia. The effects of all this were remarkable. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Antioqueños had developed such an entrenched culture of landowning independence, hard work, and entrepreneurship, that even most of the financiers in Bogota were from Antioquia.\footnote{Guillen Martinez, p. 375}

The most remarkable development in all was the emergence of Medellin, which became rich enough to lead the transition to a more industrial economy. Medellin was founded in 1616, but without major encomiendas or resguardos, it never housed important elites.\footnote{The actual capital of Antioquia was Santa Fe de Antioquia, founded in 1541. The city enjoyed a brief prosperity thanks to active gold mining during the sixteenth century, until it steadily declined throughout the seventeenth century. Eclipsed by the entrepreneurial riches of Medellin and its elites, and impoverished from the lack of mining activity, Santa Fe de Antioquia lost its status as provincial capital in 1826, when it was given to Medellin} Energized throughout the nineteenth century by the abundance of small landowners and the rising middle class, it had created sufficient synergy to attract ambitious entrepreneurs from outside the country, making it the most cosmopolitan as well as economically exciting city in the country. Its future seemed so bright that some optimists among its elite even inspired them in the early decades of the twentieth century to attempt to broker a reconciliation between Liberals and Conservatives, while using access to key public offices to encourage elites elsewhere to invest in local industrial projects and the coffee boom.

Unfortunately, this marked the beginning of the end. Despite the early success of the Colonizacion Antioqueña, its entrepreneurial class was eventually absorbed into the corrosive Colombian power politics. Still, the business legacy created by Antioqueños did spread to other parts of the country, encouraging industrialization and an improvement in communications, and
allowing some towns to develop a more commercial identity.\textsuperscript{148} It certainly encouraged individuals outside of the elites to participate in business. Nationally, the ultimate result of all this was a curious (and bewildering) amalgam of old traditions and new economic and social impulses, as the old legacy of colonial exploitation and isolation continued to exist uneasily in a nation characterized by a growing political consciousness of a rising urban working class (as indicated by the emergence of syndicalism), the coffee bonanza, the nascent industrialization in the cities, and increased foreign investment (especially in mining), all under the dubious aegis of the central government, with its factional politics and regional \textit{caciques}.\textsuperscript{149} The civil strife that erupted in the second half of the twentieth century was largely due to this mixture of discordant elements. But it was especially the result of older entrenched elites attempting to use the institutional machinery of government to coerce the newer economic and social groups into submission.

One of the most striking aspects of current Colombian political life has been the decline of elite control of the peasantry. This had long been managed through traditional patronage relationships. Taking the rural population for granted, the elites had neglected the countryside institutionally and economically for centuries. Part of this change is due to massive peasant migration. The provincial capitals continue receive large numbers of rural migrants escaping a perpetual absence of economic opportunities. This has resulted not only in increased urban poverty, but also the emergence of ever more strident voices denouncing social injustice and historic privileges.

\textsuperscript{148} Cali, near the Pacific coast, and Barranquilla, at the mouth of the Magdalena River, owe much of their economic growth to this period.

\textsuperscript{149} Even Colombian syndicalism, however, did not entirely develop along the lines of class struggle, but, as had happened in the country many times before, became an added element in the fight between rival patronage groups within the Liberal elite. See Guillen Martinez, pp. 438-445, Safford and Palacios, pp. 292-296. The Conservative response to this new partisan tool was the creation of the ANDI (National Industrialists Association) and the National Coffee Federation, as well as Conservative workers’ associations.
Even more menacingly, the armed bands that had previously fought on behalf of rival patrons have now given way to left-wing agrarian communist guerrilla movements. Traditional partisan loyalties had already been completely transformed during the violent decades between 1950 and 1970. This in turn prompted long warring elites to join forces to combat the newest menace to their authority and power: the leftwing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary forces, and drug mafias (frequently hardly distinguishable one from the other), that continue to terrorize areas of the Colombian countryside to the present day.

Even when people outside the elite have been able to take control of local political institutions through elections, conditions have not improved. Repeating what caciques, poor Spaniards and mestizos did in encomiendas and resguardos centuries earlier, these emergent political leaders have used the newly captured machinery of government to increase their status and personal wealth, while excluding those outside their own charmed circle. Some things in Colombia never change, and the old colonial lessons of how to exploit a subordinated population have endured. Consequently, the nation’s rural areas have not witnessed investments in education, transportation, or public works, while the rural population, mostly subsistence farmers or small-scale traders, have continued to face institutional obstacles that discourage entrepreneurship that does not directly benefit the politically powerful. Therefore, investments in infrastructure are almost exclusively focused on connecting the main urban centers with ports, leaving most of the hinterland underdeveloped and preventing the growth of an integrated national market. With the modernization of the country, the gap between the elites and the poor, and the indifference of the state in creating stability in rural areas, have become more evident than ever before. As a result, the danger of new political upheaval is ever present.

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150 Even the FARC and ELN guerrillas, as well as the Medellin and Cali drug cartels have made use of traditional forms of patronage to expand their influence throughout the country and protect their positions. The cartels have also ironically become important vehicles for social mobility.
Today, amidst unequal and localized socioeconomic progress, which has unfolded *in spite* of the nation’s parasitical elites, the legacies of the colonial era continue to haunt Colombia. In the midst of all of this turmoil, the country continues its slow and uneven process of modernization, economic expansion, social mobility, and national integration. Meanwhile, the political institutions of the country continue to operate in the same ways for which they were originally intended when the Spanish first created their exploitative, hierarchical imperium.

9. Conclusion

From the time Cortes and his conquistadors landed in 1519 at Veracruz, through the conquest of the Inca Empire and well beyond, the Spanish had one simple aim – to acquire as much gold, silver and other treasure as they could. They were overwhelmingly successful. Once firmly established in the Americas, their chief preoccupation was the mining of additional metal. This was extracted with the use of Indian labor, and exported to Spain.

Aside from the important crop and animal exchange between the Old World and the New, Spain’s two chief exports to the Americas were Roman Catholicism and Old World diseases. The first was intentional, the other not. Whatever the motivation of the missionaries, the hoped for effect of the first was the acceptance by the indigenous population of a colonial hierarchy that obliged them to work for their Spanish masters. The unintended effect of the second was the extinction of much of the native population. This initially reduced their numbers to a manageable size, but eventually threatened to reduce the work force disastrously.

As in all economies based on extractive industry, there was little inventive entrepreneurship. But then, none was required. Nor would the new colonial rulers have held it in anything but disdain. Castilians had come to the New World believing in the importance of war and military
glory. Their job was to fight, and conquer. In this they had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Having done their work, they expected to spend the rest of their lives living off the fruits of victory – that is, off the work of unpaid Indian labor. They did not see the need to make any other contributions, and the cities they created were purely political centers intended not for commerce or manufacture, but for the administration and control of indigenous people.

There were other reasons for this striking lack of manufacturing and entrepreneurship. The first was the absence of what Karl Marx would have called a bourgeoisie, the group he defined as the owners of the means of production. In a traditional society, that meant land. But what was most remarkable about the Spanish empire was that for a long time no European owned any of it. By royal decree the soil continued to belong to the Native American population. Christian conversion had protected them at least to this extent. Encomenderos only had claim to Indian labor, and this only by grace of the Crown. Even that privilege could not be inherited beyond the second generation. It could also be taken away at any time by royal command. As mighty as the great Spanish colonial lords might have appeared, their whole economic existence was both fragile and temporary. (The centuries-long struggle they waged with royal peninsular born officials to make their position both robust and permanent was the source of one of the great political and legal dramas of the Hispanic New World.)

The second reason was a notably small European population. That was because only Catholics were allowed to emigrate to the Spanish colonial empires. The Church feared that the presence of heretics would confuse indigenous peoples. The actual result was that very few Spaniards felt any need to resettle across the Atlantic. (Religious minorities anxious to leave Spain therefore had to find refuge elsewhere. Among them were Castilian Jews who eventually settled in Ottoman ruled Salonika.) This is in striking contrast to English policy, which used the
colonies as dumping grounds for unwanted religious minorities (which is how the North American colonies from Massachusetts to Maryland were populated) or for criminals (as in the case of Georgia, and later Australia).

The English, whether consciously or not, had followed the ancient Greek and Roman practice of setting their own people in new places. (The original Latin term “colonia” means a farm, or settled land.) Earlier inhabitants were regarded as impediments to be swept aside. Massachusetts Puritans had been inspired by the Biblical story of the Children of Israel entering the land of Canaan. While certainly exaggerated, this attitude was not untypical. (The British would first face the challenge of dealing with a large indigenous population only in the eighteenth century, when the East India Company began full-fledged rule in parts of India.)

The Spanish Catholic Church had a different vision. Indigenous peoples were to be both “saved”, and embraced spiritually (and, despite its best efforts, carnally). It is one of the great ironies of history that this decision proved almost as much a disaster as more ruthless English policies. Diseases such as smallpox and measles spread with remarkable velocity. It also eventually produced a very large mixed-race population that Spanish officials had great difficulty in controlling, or even categorizing. The panic this diversity produced in official circles is demonstrated in the increasingly elaborate and recondite racial charts that became a common place throughout the empire.151

151 According to official classifications, children of Spanish and Indian parents were mestizos. The child of a Spaniard and a mestizo was a castizo. The child of a Spaniard and an African (classified as Negro) was a mulato. The offspring of a Spaniard and a mulato was a morisco. The child of an African and an Indian was a zambo. Other more complicated racial mixtures resulted in abusive terms such as lobo (wolf) and chino (from cochino – pig), or others as fanciful as turna atras (turns back) and tente en el aire (hold yourself in mid-air). The entire system was as cruel as it was absurd. Magali Carrera, Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings (Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture) (University of Texas Press, Austin, 2003), p. 12
The original simple colonial division of a Republica de Españoles and a Republica de Indios that insured a docile labor supply for the mines began to be threatened by a growing number of people whose partial European origin exempted them from much of the tributary labor demanded of Indians. The original bureaucratic response was to create the resguardos, places where these might remain untouched by promiscuous Spaniards, as well as the subversive influence of blacks, mestizos, and mulattos. However, this eventually led to a fundamental disruption of property relationships, as the creation of Indian reservations emptied land that for the first time came to be owned outright by Spanish elites.

The evolution of the encomienda with its quasi-serf labor to the freehold hacienda worked by paid farm hands was remarkable. The way in which the Spanish compensated themselves for the loss of servile labor with the ownership of land was a great political achievement. But more remarkable than any of this was the unchanging nature, through it all, of Colombian towns, and of the way in which institutions have been coerced to serve a privileged minority. Throughout the colonial period, and during the republic up to today, the major towns have remained centers of political and economic exclusiveness. Their narrow and self-serving elites continue to enrich themselves by ensuring access to the institutional machinery, while the great majority of the population, whether urban or rural, remain largely without opportunity or hope. Institutions continue to follow a dichotomy of efficiency through deceit for political elites, and of subordination and inefficiency for the rest, reinforcing the colonial pattern in which institutions only work if one has the ability to influence them through trickery. Even the so-called Colonizacion Antioqueña, with its self-sufficient farmers, non-parasitic town populations, foreign entrepreneurs, and inclusive social relations could not change the nation’s old colonial

152 Government contracting, concessions, provincial revenues, and multinational royalties, for example, are almost completely subordinated to the interests of those who can access key institutions to ensure they are the first, and for the most part only beneficiaries. Thus, modern Colombian institutions continue to be extractive in nature.
pattern of exploitative urban domination and rural subservience.\textsuperscript{153} The city and the countryside continue to live in two separate worlds.\textsuperscript{154} This unresponsiveness of the former to the latter remains one of Colombia’s greatest problem today.

\textsuperscript{153} The great irony is that the success of the \textit{Colonizacion Antioqueña} was predicated on the absence of an Indian population to exploit.

\textsuperscript{154} This same severe urban rural division was a commonplace in Central and Eastern Europe right until the end of the Second World War. Travelers in Hungary were especially struck by the contrast between modern conditions and attitudes in Budapest and a countryside still living as it had in the eighteenth century.
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