Mexican Independence and Anglo-American Expansion Historical Analysis

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Introduction

The political transformation of North America during the nineteenth century involved more than the creation of independent nations. It also involved racial hierarchy, migration, land speculation, slavery, territorial expansion, and the displacement of Indigenous peoples. The Mexican War of Independence weakened the colonial social system inherited from Spain, while the later movement of Anglo-American settlers into Mexican Texas altered the demographic and political balance of the northern borderlands.

The colonial Casta system contributed to dissatisfaction in New Spain by associating ancestry, skin color, birthplace, occupation, and legal status with access to privilege. Indigenous people, Afro-Mexicans, mixed-race communities, American-born Spaniards, and European-born Spaniards occupied unequal positions within colonial society. These divisions influenced participation in the Mexican independence struggle, although the people involved did not all pursue the same political or economic objectives.

After Mexico achieved independence in 1821, the official use of colonial caste distinctions declined, and the new nation increasingly promoted a common Mexican citizenship. However, legal equality did not immediately eliminate racial discrimination, poverty, unequal landownership, or inherited social privilege.

At the same time, the Mexican government encouraged migration into Texas as a way of developing and defending its northern frontier. Anglo-American settlers were attracted by inexpensive land, economic opportunity, cotton production, protection from some United States creditors, and, for certain settlers and speculators, the possibility that Texas might eventually be annexed by the United States.

The growth of Anglo-American settlement contributed to conflict with Mexico and formed part of a wider process of territorial expansion. This expansion supported the geographic and economic development of the United States, but it depended heavily on the acquisition of Indigenous lands, the removal of Native communities, and the spread of plantation slavery. The development of modern North American nations must therefore be understood as both a history of independence and a history of dispossession.

The Casta System in Colonial Mexico

The Casta system was a social classification associated with Spanish colonial rule in New Spain. It placed people into racial and social categories based partly on ancestry and perceived racial mixture. Common terms included *español*, *criollo*, *indio*, *mestizo*, *negro*, and *mulato*, while additional labels attempted to describe more complex combinations of European, Indigenous, and African ancestry.

European-born Spaniards, commonly known as peninsulares, generally occupied the most privileged positions in colonial government and society. Criollos were people of Spanish ancestry born in the Americas. Although they could own property, receive an education, and achieve considerable wealth, they were often excluded from the highest offices reserved for people born in Spain.

Indigenous communities occupied a different legal and social position within colonial society. The Spanish Crown formally recognized certain Indigenous communities and lands, but colonial tribute requirements, compulsory labor, religious control, land pressure, and political subordination created extensive inequality. People of African descent included both enslaved and free individuals, while mixed-race populations occupied varied and often uncertain positions.

The system should not be understood as a perfectly rigid ladder in which every individual's status was fixed permanently. Wealth, occupation, family reputation, location, cultural behavior, and personal connections could sometimes alter how a person was classified or treated. Nevertheless, ancestry and skin color strongly influenced access to power, legal protection, honor, education, and economic opportunity (Vinson, 2018).

The Casta system was therefore both racial and socioeconomic. It did not simply identify biological ancestry. It helped colonial authorities organize society, distribute privileges, and distinguish groups that were considered more or less entitled to authority.

Social Hierarchy and Discontent Before Independence

The unequal colonial order contributed to widespread resentment among groups that received fewer rights and opportunities. European-born Spaniards controlled many of the most powerful positions in government, the church, commerce, and the military. Criollo elites resented their exclusion from senior political authority, while rural Indigenous, mixed-race, and Afro-Mexican populations often faced poverty, labor exploitation, tribute obligations, slavery, and restricted access to land.

These groups did not necessarily share one revolutionary program. Criollo supporters of independence frequently wanted greater political autonomy and access to positions previously controlled by peninsulares. Rural insurgents were often more concerned with local land disputes, working conditions, tribute, community survival, and protection from abusive authorities.

The struggle for Mexican independence was therefore not only a conflict between Mexico and Spain. It was also an internal conflict among social classes, regions, ethnic communities, political factions, and competing visions of the future. Van Young (2001) describes the conflict as both a war of national liberation and a localized social struggle involving rural communities, particularly Indigenous peasants.

The original article correctly connects the Casta system with revolutionary discontent. However, social hierarchy was one cause among several. The political crisis of the Spanish monarchy, the French invasion of Spain, economic pressure, colonial taxation, Enlightenment ideas, local grievances, and conflicts among elites also contributed to the rebellion.

The Mexican War of Independence

The Mexican War of Independence began in 1810 when Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla called for rebellion against Spanish authority. Hidalgo's forces attracted large numbers of rural workers, Indigenous people, mestizos, and other marginalized groups.

The substantial participation of nonelite communities gave the insurgency its military strength, but it also frightened many property-owning criollos. Some elites feared that a mass rebellion would threaten estates, wealth, social authority, and personal safety. Consequently, colonial ancestry did not determine political loyalty in a simple way. Some criollos supported independence, while others defended Spanish rule because they feared social revolution.

After Hidalgo's defeat and execution, José María Morelos continued the independence movement. His political program, expressed in the 1813 document *Sentiments of the Nation*, called for independence, the abolition of slavery, and an end to legal distinctions based on caste. It stated that citizens should be distinguished by virtue rather than ancestry (Library of Congress, 2011).

These principles challenged the colonial order by proposing a shared political identity that crossed inherited racial classifications. However, they did not immediately transform social conditions across the country. The war continued until 1821, and the coalition that ultimately achieved independence was more conservative than the earlier popular insurgency.

The Plan of Iguala, issued in 1821, united former royalists and insurgents under the guarantees of religion, independence, and union. Mexico achieved political independence, but many existing property relations and elite privileges remained intact.

Did Independence End the Casta System?

Mexican independence weakened the formal legal basis of the Casta system. The new country increasingly treated its inhabitants as members of a common national community rather than

officially dividing them through the detailed colonial racial categories.

The decline of official caste terminology helped create a broader Mexican national identity. People who had previously been described through numerous colonial classifications were increasingly identified as Mexicans. In this sense, independence contributed to dismantling the official structure of caste distinctions.

However, it would be inaccurate to claim that the war immediately created an egalitarian society. Formal citizenship did not erase the economic and social consequences of colonialism. Indigenous communities continued to experience land loss, political marginalization, cultural pressure, and poverty. Afro-Mexicans remained subject to discrimination, while lighter-skinned elites continued to possess disproportionate wealth and authority.

Racial labels could disappear from official political language while racialized social practices continued. A government's declaration of equality does not automatically redistribute land, improve working conditions, eliminate prejudice, or provide equal access to education and political power.

The original article also associates the independence movement with the redistribution of land. Land access was an important concern for many rural insurgents, but independence in 1821 did not create comprehensive national land reform. Large-scale agrarian redistribution occurred mainly after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the constitutional reforms of the twentieth century.

The accurate conclusion is therefore that Mexican independence formally rejected many colonial caste distinctions and promoted equal citizenship, but it did not fully eliminate inherited racial and economic inequality.

The Creation of a Mexican National Identity

The independence struggle contributed to the formation of a Mexican national identity by bringing people from different backgrounds into a common conflict against Spanish rule. Military participation, political writing, religious symbolism, and shared opposition to colonial government encouraged the idea of a nation composed of people born in the Americas.

The Virgin of Guadalupe became an especially powerful symbol because she was associated with Mexican religious identity and had meaning for both Indigenous and mixed-race communities. National leaders also increasingly celebrated Mexico's Indigenous past as distinct from Spanish colonial rule.

However, national identity involved contradictions. Political leaders could celebrate ancient Indigenous civilizations while neglecting or suppressing living Indigenous communities. The public image of Mexico increasingly emphasized mestizaje, or racial and cultural mixture, but this national ideal could obscure continuing discrimination and the political autonomy of distinct Indigenous

nations.

The creation of a common identity therefore helped weaken official Casta classifications, yet it did not necessarily provide equal recognition to all cultural groups. National unity sometimes required communities to abandon or reduce their separate languages, legal traditions, and political identities.

Anglo-American Migration Into Mexican Texas

After Mexico became independent, its northern territories were sparsely populated from the perspective of government officials in Mexico City. Mexican authorities wanted to increase settlement, develop agriculture, strengthen the economy, and create a buffer against foreign encroachment and attacks.

The government used the empresario system to recruit settlers. Empresarios received permission to bring approved families into Texas and assist them in obtaining land. Stephen F. Austin became the most famous empresario, continuing a colonization project initially planned by his father, Moses Austin.

The settlers were expected to follow Mexican law, become Mexican citizens, and generally adopt Catholicism. In exchange, they could obtain land on more favorable terms than were commonly available in the United States.

The availability of inexpensive and fertile land attracted farmers, merchants, land speculators, and enslavers. Cotton agriculture was especially influential because the growth of textile manufacturing had made cotton a profitable international commodity. Many migrants from the southern United States brought enslaved African Americans with them and sought to establish plantation agriculture in Texas (Torget, 2015).

Anglo-American migration was therefore not merely a movement of families seeking a new home. It was connected to land speculation, commercial agriculture, slavery, international markets, and competing national claims over the borderlands.

Annexation Prospects and the Land Market

The original article correctly states that the prospect of annexation attracted or encouraged some Anglo-American settlers and land speculators. Not every early immigrant arrived with the immediate goal of separating Texas from Mexico, but expectations about the territory’s political future influenced land values and migration.

Some settlers believed that annexation by the United States would increase immigration, create demand for land, improve access to American markets, and raise the value of their property. A person

who acquired a large tract at a low price could profit if population growth increased demand.

Land therefore functioned as both a productive resource and a speculative asset. Settlers could grow crops, raise livestock, sell land to later immigrants, or hold property in anticipation of rising values.

The expectation of annexation also reflected cultural and political connections with the United States. Many settlers spoke English, maintained commercial relationships across the border, practiced Protestantism, and brought American legal and political assumptions with them.

These ties sometimes conflicted with Mexican efforts to incorporate Texas into the national system. Tensions increased over immigration restrictions, taxation, political centralization, local autonomy, and slavery. Although the causes of the Texas Revolution were complex, Anglo-American settlement altered the demographic and economic balance in ways that made political conflict more likely.

Debt Refuge as a Reason for Migration

Some Anglo-American settlers were also drawn to Mexican Texas because it could provide refuge from debts incurred in the United States. Mexico and the United States lacked reciprocal arrangements that would automatically allow American creditors to collect debts or return certain fugitives from Mexican territory.

A debtor who crossed into Texas could therefore become more difficult for an American creditor to reach. Henson (2021) notes that some settlers moved to the Mexican colony while fleeing debts and seeking protection from creditors.

Debt refuge should not be presented as the main motivation of every settler. Many migrants were attracted by land, family connections, agricultural opportunity, climate, trade, or the possibility of social advancement. Nevertheless, protection from creditors formed part of the frontier's appeal for some individuals.

This factor also reveals the uneven character of migration. The image of the independent pioneer can hide the fact that some settlers were escaping financial obligations, legal difficulties, or previous failures. Texas offered the possibility of economic reinvention as well as territorial opportunity.

Slavery and Anglo-American Settlement

The original essay does not discuss slavery directly, but it is essential to understanding Anglo-American settlement in Texas. Migrants from the southern United States wanted to reproduce a cotton economy dependent on enslaved labor.

Mexico gradually moved toward abolishing slavery after independence. This policy conflicted with the interests of Anglo-American enslavers, who attempted to preserve slavery through legal exceptions,

labor contracts, and political pressure.

The cotton economy connected Texas to the expanding plantation regions of the United States. Land, enslaved labor, and access to markets created the economic foundation for much Anglo-American settlement. Torget (2015) argues that cotton and slavery transformed the Texas borderlands and shaped the conflict that led to Texas independence.

The issue complicates the language of freedom and independence. Anglo-American settlers could demand political liberty from Mexico while denying freedom to enslaved African Americans. Similarly, territorial expansion could be celebrated as national progress while relying on the dispossession of Indigenous communities.

A complete analysis must therefore ask whose independence was being defended and whose freedom was being restricted.

Understanding the Term Anglo-American Civilization

The original article defines “Anglo-American civilization” as the settlement and establishment of control by English-speaking populations, especially those originating in Great Britain and the United States.

The term can describe shared linguistic, political, legal, religious, and cultural influences associated with Britain and the United States. These influences include the English language, common-law traditions, representative government, Protestant religious movements, commercial capitalism, and particular ideas about private property.

However, the word *civilization* is not neutral. Nineteenth-century settlers and political leaders often described Anglo-American expansion as the spread of civilization into supposedly empty or undeveloped territory. This language portrayed Indigenous peoples as obstacles to progress and helped justify the seizure of their lands.

The land was not empty. It contained sovereign Native nations with established political systems, trade networks, cultural traditions, and relationships to specific territories. Describing Anglo-American expansion only as the advancement of civilization ignores the violence, coercion, treaty violations, and displacement that frequently accompanied settlement.

It is therefore more accurate to refer to Anglo-American settlement, colonization, or political expansion when discussing the transfer of land and power. These terms allow historians to examine both the institutions settlers created and the costs imposed on existing populations.

Indigenous Peoples and North American Expansion

Anglo-American expansion profoundly affected Indigenous peoples across North America. Settlers, companies, and governments sought Indigenous land for farms, plantations, transportation routes, towns, mineral extraction, and commercial development.

The process occurred through warfare, treaties, purchases made under unequal conditions, fraud, legislation, forced migration, and the creation of reservations. Even agreements formally described as voluntary often took place under intense military and political pressure.

Indigenous communities were not passive. They negotiated, traded, resisted, formed alliances, adapted to changing conditions, used American and European legal systems, and defended their sovereignty. Native nations also had different interests and sometimes competed with one another.

Nevertheless, the growing population and military power of the United States placed severe pressure on Indigenous territory. As new states entered the Union, settlers demanded that governments remove Native claims to land within state boundaries.

The expansion of the United States depended heavily on transforming Indigenous homelands into property that could be surveyed, purchased, sold, taxed, and occupied by settlers.

Indian Removal and the Growth of the United States

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized the president to negotiate agreements intended to move Indigenous nations living east of the Mississippi River to territory in the West.

Supporters described removal as voluntary and beneficial. In practice, coercion, fraudulent agreements, military pressure, and state violence played major roles. The policy affected the Cherokee, Muscogee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and other Native nations.

By the end of Andrew Jackson’s presidency, the federal government had negotiated nearly 70 removal agreements. These measures relocated approximately 50,000 Indigenous people and opened around 25 million acres of eastern land to white settlement and the expansion of slavery (National Archives and Records Administration, 2022).

The Cherokee removal, remembered as the Trail of Tears, followed the disputed Treaty of New Echota. Most Cherokee people opposed the agreement, but the United States government enforced removal. Approximately 16,000 Cherokees were forced west, and an estimated 4,000 died during the process.

The forced displacement of Indigenous peoples supported the geographic and economic growth of the United States. It made land available for settlement, cotton cultivation, state formation, transportation, and commercial investment. However, that growth came at an immense human and cultural cost.

Cultural Loss and Disruption

Removal involved much more than relocation from one physical place to another. Indigenous identities, economies, spiritual practices, political institutions, and family histories were connected to particular landscapes.

Forced migration separated communities from burial grounds, sacred sites, hunting territories, agricultural lands, waterways, and places associated with collective memory. It also disrupted systems of leadership, trade, food production, and social responsibility.

After removal, federal policies continued to pressure Native peoples to abandon communal landholding, languages, religious traditions, and political autonomy. The reservation system, boarding schools, allotment policies, and restrictions on cultural practices attempted to reshape Indigenous societies according to Euro-American expectations.

The resulting cultural loss should not be mistaken for cultural disappearance. Native nations survived, maintained traditions, rebuilt institutions, pursued legal claims, and continued defending sovereignty. Indigenous cultures remain living and changing rather than merely historical remnants.

Territorial Expansion and the Formation of Modern Nations

The original article argues that colonization laid the groundwork for modern North American nations. This is accurate, but the process should be understood critically.

The boundaries and institutions of the United States and Mexico emerged through wars, treaties, migration, rebellion, settlement, and the incorporation of territories already inhabited by diverse peoples.

Texas declared independence from Mexico in 1836 and existed as an independent republic before joining the United States in 1845. The annexation of Texas intensified the boundary dispute that contributed to the Mexican-American War.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended that war in 1848. Mexico relinquished its claim to Texas and ceded approximately 55% of its territory, including lands that became California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, and parts of several other states (National Archives and Records Administration, 2022).

The territorial expansion of the United States created access to the Pacific, enlarged agricultural and mineral resources, and strengthened national economic power. At the same time, it placed Mexican residents and numerous Indigenous nations under a new government.

Although the treaty promised property and civil protections to Mexican residents in the transferred territories, many later experienced land loss, discrimination, political exclusion, and unequal treatment.

Modern nation-building was therefore not simply the creation of borders. It involved decisions about citizenship, property, race, sovereignty, language, and whose historical claims would receive legal recognition.

The Continuing Legacy of Dispossession

The consequences of nineteenth-century expansion remain visible. Native nations continue to pursue treaty rights, land claims, language revitalization, cultural preservation, environmental protection, and political sovereignty.

Many contemporary disputes involving water, natural resources, sacred sites, pipelines, and jurisdiction are rooted in treaties and land transfers made during the expansion of the United States. These are not only historical controversies because earlier policies continue to shape present legal and economic conditions.

Mexican American communities also continue to experience the legacy of conquest and territorial incorporation. Families that lived in the Southwest before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo became minorities within the expanding United States. Their experiences complicate the common idea that all Mexican migration occurred after the establishment of the present border.

The history of expansion also influenced later civil rights movements. Indigenous activists, Mexican American organizations, African American leaders, and other groups challenged racial hierarchy, unequal citizenship, cultural suppression, and discriminatory control of land and institutions.

Remembering this history does not require denying the political or economic achievements of the United States and Mexico. It requires recognizing that national development produced unequal benefits and costs.

Comparing Mexican Independence and Anglo-American Expansion

Mexican independence and Anglo-American expansion both challenged an existing political order, but they did so in different ways.

Mexican insurgents sought to end Spanish colonial rule and create a sovereign nation. Marginalized communities participated in the conflict partly because they hoped to end caste distinctions, slavery, tribute, economic exploitation, and restrictions on land.

Anglo-American settlers in Texas moved into territory controlled by an independent Mexico. Many initially accepted Mexican land grants and citizenship requirements, but growing numbers later supported separation and annexation to the United States.

Both histories used the language of liberty. Mexican revolutionaries demanded national independence from Spain, while Texas revolutionaries demanded independence from Mexico. However, liberty was applied unevenly. Elite political independence did not guarantee land or equality for poor Mexicans, and Texas independence protected an economy increasingly connected to slavery.

The two histories also involved Indigenous peoples whose sovereignty was frequently ignored by both Mexican and Anglo-American political projects. The creation of national borders did not eliminate Native nations, but it placed their territories within expanding states that claimed authority over them.

Conclusion

The Casta system played an important role in the conditions leading to Mexican independence because it reinforced a colonial hierarchy based on ancestry, birthplace, wealth, legal status, and social reputation. Criollos resented peninsular control of high office, while Indigenous people, Afro-Mexicans, mixed-race workers, and rural communities faced more severe forms of exploitation and exclusion.

The Mexican War of Independence drew substantial manpower from these marginalized populations. Their participation helped weaken the colonial order and contributed to the development of a common Mexican identity. Independence formally rejected caste distinctions and slavery, but it did not immediately redistribute land or establish complete racial and economic equality.

After independence, Mexico encouraged Anglo-American settlement in Texas to develop and defend its northern frontier. Settlers were drawn by inexpensive land, cotton production, commercial opportunity, debt refuge, and expectations that annexation might increase land values. The growth of settlement also expanded slavery and intensified political conflict with Mexico.

The term “Anglo-American civilization” describes important English-speaking political and cultural influences, but it can conceal the colonial nature of territorial expansion. The growth of the United States depended on acquiring Indigenous land through warfare, treaties, coercion, removal, and settlement.

Forced displacement helped create new states, expand plantation agriculture, strengthen national

markets, and increase the geographic power of the United States. At the same time, it caused death, cultural disruption, land loss, and continuing inequality among Native peoples.

The creation of modern North America must therefore be understood through both independence and dispossession. Political freedom for one population did not automatically provide freedom or equality for another. A balanced historical interpretation recognizes national development while also acknowledging the people whose lands, labor, rights, and cultures were placed at risk during that process.

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