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Open Veins of Latin America

Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent

Translated by Cedric Belfrage

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"We have maintained a silence closely resembling stupidity."

—From the Revolutionary Proclamation of
the Junta Tuitiva, La Paz, July 16, 1809

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1. Lust for Gold, Lust for Silver

The Sign of the Cross on the Hilt of the Sword

When Christopher Columbus headed across the great emptiness west of Christendom, he had accepted the challenge of legend. Terrible storms would play with his ships as if they were nutshells and hurl them into the jaws of monsters; the sea serpent, hungry for human flesh, would be lying in wait in the murky depths. According to fifteenth-century man, only one thousand years remained before the purifying flames of the Last Judgment would destroy the world, and the world was then the Mediterranean Sea with its uncertain horizons: Europe, Africa, Asia. Portuguese navigators spoke of strange corpses and curiously carved pieces of wood that floated in on the west wind, but no one suspected that the world was about to be startlingly extended by a great new land.

America not only lacked a name. The Norwegians did not know they had discovered it long ago, and Columbus himself died convinced that he had reached Asia by the western route. In 1492, when Spanish boats first trod the beaches of the Bahamas, the Admiral thought these islands were an outpost of the fabulous isle of Zipango —Japan. Columbus took along a copy of Marco Polo's book, and covered its margins with notes. The inhabitants of Zipango, said Marco Polo, "have gold in the greatest abundance, its sources being inexhaustible. . . . In this island there are pearls also, in large quantities, of a red color, round in shape, and of great size, equal in value to, or

even exceeding that of white pearls." [1] The wealth of Zipango had become known to the Great Kubla Khan, stirring a desire to conquer it, but he had failed. Out of Marco Polo's sparkling pages leaped all the good things of creation: there were nearly thirteen thousand islands in the Indian seas, with mountains of gold and pearls and twelve kinds of spices in enormous quantities, in addition to an abundance of white and black pepper.

Pepper, ginger, cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon were as prized as salt in preserving meat against putrefaction and loss of flavor in winter. Spain's Catholic rulers decided to finance the adventure to get direct access to the sources and to free themselves from the burdensome chain of intermediaries and speculators who monopolized the trade in spices and tropical plants, muslins and sidearms, from the mysterious East. The desire for precious metals, the medium of payment in commercial dealings, also sparked the crossing of the sinister seas. All of Europe needed silver; the seams in Bohemia, Saxony, and the Tyrol were almost exhausted.

For Spain it was an era of reconquest: 1492 was not only the year of the discovery of America, the new world born of that error which had such momentous consequences, but also of the recovery of Granada. Early that year Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, whose marriage had linked their dominions, stormed the last Arab redoubt on Spanish soil. It had taken nearly eight centuries to win back what was lost in seven years, and the war of reconquest had drained the royal treasury. But this was a holy war, a Christian war against Islam; and it was no accident that, in that same year of 1492, 150,000 Jews were expelled from the country. Spain achieved unity and reality as a nation wielding swords with the Sign of the Cross on their hilts. Queen Isabella became the patroness of the Holy Inquisition. The feat of discovering America can only be understood in the context of the tradition of crusading wars that prevailed in medieval Castile; the Church needed no prompting to provide a halo for the conquest of unknown lands across the ocean. Pope Alexander VI, who was Spanish, ordained Queen Isabella as proprietor and master of the New World. The expansion of the kingdom of Castile extended God's reign over the earth.

Three years after the discovery Columbus personally directed the

military campaign against the natives of Haiti, which he called Española. A handful of cavalry, two hundred foot soldiers, and a few specially trained dogs decimated the Indians. More than five hundred, shipped to Spain, were sold as slaves in Seville and died miserably. Some theologians protested and the enslavement of Indians was formally banned at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Actually it was not banned but blessed: before each military action the captains of the conquest were required to read to the Indians, without an interpreter but before a notary public, a long and rhetorical *Requerimiento* exhorting them to adopt the holy Catholic faith:

> If you do not, or if you maliciously delay in so doing, I certify that with God's help I will advance powerfully against you and make war on you wherever and however I am able, and will subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their majesties and take your women and children to be slaves, and as such I will sell and dispose of them as their majesties may order, and I will take your possessions and do you all the harm and damage that I can.[2]

America was the vast kingdom of the Devil, its redemption impossible or doubtful; but the fanatical mission against the natives' heresy was mixed with the fever that New World treasures stirred in the conquering hosts. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, faithful comrade of Hernán Cortés in the conquest of Mexico, wrote that they had arrived in America "to serve God and His Majesty and also to get riches."

At his first landing on San Salvador atoll, Columbus was dazzled by the transparent hues of the Caribbean, the green landscape, the soft clean air, the magnificent birds, and the youths "with size and with good faces and well made" who lived there. He gave the natives "some red caps and strings of beads, and many other trifles of small value, which gave them great pleasure. Wherewith they were much delighted, and this made them so much our friends that it was a marvel to see." They knew nothing of swords, and when these were shown to them they grasped the sharp edges and cut themselves. Meanwhile, as the Admiral relates in his logbook, "I was very attentive to them, and strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of metal hanging at their noses, I gathered from them by signs that by going southward or steering round the island in

that direction, there would be found a king who possessed great cups full of gold, and in large quantities." [3] For "of gold is treasure made, and with it he who has it does as he wills in the world and it even sends souls to Paradise."

On his third voyage, Columbus still believed he was in the China Sea when he was off the coast of Venezuela. This did not prevent him from reporting that an endless land which was earthly paradise extended from there. Later Amerigo Vespucci, an early sixteenth-century explorer of the Brazilian coast, reported to Lorenzo de Medici: "The trees are of such beauty and sweetness that we felt we were in earthly Paradise." [4] * In 1503 Columbus wrote to his monarchs from Jamaica: "When I discovered the Indies, I said they were the greatest rich domain in the world. I spoke of the gold, pearls, precious stones, spices . . ."

In the Middle Ages a small bag of pepper was worth more than a man's life, but gold and silver were the keys used by the Renaissance to open the doors of paradise in heaven and of capitalist mercantilism on earth. The epic of the Spaniards and Portuguese in America combined propagation of the Christian faith with usurpation and plunder of native wealth. European power stretched out to embrace the world. The virgin lands, bristling with jungles and dangers, fanned the flames of avarice among the captains, the *hidalgos* on horseback, and the ragged soldiers who went out after the spectacular booty of war: they believed in glory, in "the sun of the dead," and in the key to achieving it, which Cortés defined thus: "Fortune favors the daring." Cortés himself had mortgaged everything he owned to equip his Mexican expedition. With a few exceptions—Columbus, Pedrarias Dávila, Magellan—the expeditions of conquest were not financed by the state but by the conquistadores themselves, or by businessmen who put up money for their ventures.

The myth of El Dorado, the golden king, was born: golden were

* The lawyer Antonio de León Pinelo devoted two entire volumes to demonstrating that the Garden of Eden was in America. In *El Paraíso en el Nuevo Mundo* (1656) he had a map of South America showing, in the center, the Garden of Eden watered by the Amazon, the Río de la Plata, the Orinoco, and the Magdalena. The forbidden fruit was the banana. The map showed the exact spot from which Noah's Ark took off at the time of the Flood.

the streets and houses of his kingdom's cities. In search of El Dorado a century after Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh sailed up the Orinoco and was defeated by its cataracts. The will-o'-the-wisp of the "mountain that gushed silver" became a reality in 1545 with the discovery of Potosí, but before this many adventurers who sailed up the Rio Paraná in a vain search for the silver spring had died of hunger or disease or pierced by native arrows.

There was indeed gold and silver in large quantities, accumulated in the Mexican plateau and the Andean *altiplano*. In 1519 Cortés told Spain of the fabulous magnitude of Montezuma's Aztec treasure, and fifteen years later there arrived in Seville the gigantic ransom—a roomful of gold and two of silver—which Francisco Pizarro had made the Inca Atahualpa pay before strangling him. Years earlier the Crown had paid the sailors on Columbus' first voyage with gold carried off from the Antilles. The Caribbean island populations finally stopped paying tribute because they had disappeared: they were totally exterminated in the gold mines, in the deadly task of sifting auriferous sands with their bodies half submerged in water, or in breaking up the ground beyond the point of exhaustion, doubled up over the heavy cultivating tools brought from Spain. Many natives of Haiti anticipated the fate imposed by their white oppressors: they killed their children and committed mass suicide. The mid-sixteenth-century historian Fernández de Oviedo interpreted the Antillean holocaust thus: "Many of them, by way of diversion, took poison rather than work, and others hanged themselves with their own hands." [5] *

The Gods Return with Secret Weapons

While passing Tenerife on his first voyage, Columbus had witnessed a great volcanic eruption. It seemed an omen of all that would come later in the immense new lands which, surprisingly, stood athwart the western route to Asia. America was there—at first the

* His interpretation founded a school. I am amazed to read, in the latest (1970) book by the French technician René Dumont, *Cuba: Is It Socialism?*: "The Indians were not totally exterminated. Their genes subsist in Cuban chromosomes. They felt such an aversion for the tension which continuous work demands that some killed themselves rather than accept forced labor . . ."

subject of conjecture from its endless coasts, then conquered in successive waves like a furious tide beating in. Admirals gave place to governors, ships' crews were converted into invading hosts. Papal bulls had apostolically granted Africa to the Portuguese Crown, and the lands "unknown like those already discovered by your envoys and those to be discovered in the future" to the Crown of Castile. America had been given to Queen Isabella. In 1508 another bull granted the Spanish Crown, in perpetuity, all tithes collected in America. The coveted patronage of the New World Church included a royal prerogative over all ecclesiastical benefices.

The Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494, allowed Portugal to occupy Latin American territories below a dividing line traced by the Pope, and in 1530 Martim Affonso de Sousa founded the first Portuguese communities in Brazil, expelling French intruders. By then the Spaniards, crossing an infinity of hellish jungles and hostile deserts, had advanced far in the process of exploration and conquest. In 1513 the South Pacific glittered before the eyes of Vasco Núñez de Balboa. In the fall of 1522 the eighteen survivors of Ferdinand Magellan's expedition returned to Spain: they had for the first time united both oceans and confirmed that the world was round by circling it. Three years earlier Hernán Cortés' ten ships had sailed from Cuba toward Mexico, and in 1523 Pedro de Alvarado launched the conquest of Central America. Francisco Pizarro, an illiterate pig-breeder, triumphantly entered Cuzco in 1533 and seized the heart of the Inca empire. In 1540 Pedro de Valdivia crossed the Atacama desert and founded Santiago de Chile. The conquistadores penetrated the Chaco and laid bare the New World from Peru to the mouth of the mightiest river on our planet.

There was something of everything among the natives of Latin America: astronomers and cannibals, engineers and Stone Age savages. But none of the native cultures knew iron or the plow, or glass, or gunpowder, or used the wheel except on their votive carts. The civilization from across the ocean that descended upon these lands was undergoing the creative explosion of the Renaissance: Latin America seemed like another invention to be incorporated, along with gunpowder, printing, paper, and the compass, in the bubbling birth of the Modern Age. The unequal development of the two

worlds explains the relative ease with which native civilizations succumbed. Cortés landed at Veracruz with no more than 100 sailors and 508 soldiers; he had 16 horses, 32 crossbows, 10 bronze cannon, and a few harquebuses, muskets, and pistols. Pizarro entered Cajamarca with 180 soldiers and 37 horses. That was enough. Yet the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, was then five times larger than Madrid and had double the population of Seville, Spain's largest city, and in Peru Pizarro met an army of 100,000 Indians.

The Indians were also defeated by terror. The emperor Montezuma received the first news in his palace: a large hill was moving over the sea. More messengers arrived: "He was very alarmed by the report of how the cannon exploded, how its thunder reverberated, and how it filled one with awe and stunned one's ears. And when it went off, a sort of stone ball came from its entrails and it rained fire." The strangers sat on "deer as high as the rooftops." Their bodies were completely covered, "only their faces can be seen. They are white, as if made of lime. They have yellow hair, although some have black. Long are their beards." [6] Montezuma thought it was the god Quetzalcoatl returning: there had been eight prophesies of this not long before. Hunters had brought him a bird with a round mirror-like crest on its head in which the sunset was reflected; in this mirror Montezuma saw squadrons of warriors marching on Mexico. Quetzalcoatl had come from the east and gone to the east: he was white and bearded. Also white and bearded was Viracocha, the bisexual god of the Incas. And the east was the cradle of the Mayas' hero-ancestors.*

The avenging gods who were now returning to settle accounts with their peoples had armor and coats of mail, lustrous caparisons that deflected arrows and stones; their weapons emitted deadly rays and darkened the air with suffocating smoke. The conquistadores also practiced the arts of treachery and intrigue with refined expertise. They sagely allied themselves with the Tlaxcalans against Montezuma and effectively exploited the split in the Inca empire be-

* These remarkable coincidences have given rise to the hypothesis that the gods of the native religions were really Europeans who reached our shores long before Columbus.[7]

tween the brothers Huáscar and Atahualpa. They knew how to win accomplices for their crimes among the intermediate ruling classes, priests, officials, and defeated soldiers and high Indian chiefs. But they also used other weapons—or, if you prefer, other factors operated objectively for the victory of the invaders. Horses and bacteria, for example.

Horses, like camels, had once been indigenous to Latin America but had become extinct. In Europe, where they were introduced by Arab horsemen, they had proved to be of enormous military and economic value. When they reappeared in Latin America during the conquest, they lent magic powers to the invaders in the natives' astonished eyes. Atahualpa saw the first Spanish soldiers arriving on spirited steeds adorned with plumes and little bells, making thunder and clouds of dust with their swift hooves: panic-stricken, the Inca fell down on his back. The chief Tecum, leading the descendents of the Mayas, beheaded the horse of Pedro de Alvarado with his lance, convinced that it was part of the conquistador: Alvarado stood up and killed him. A few horses in medieval war trappings scattered the mass of Indians, sowing terror and death. During the colonizing process, priests and missionaries spread for the superstitious Indians' benefit the tale that horses were of sacred origin, for Santiago, Spain's patron saint, rode a white horse which had won valient victories against the Moors and the Jews with the aid of Divine Providence.

Bacteria and viruses were the most effective allies. The Europeans brought with them, like biblical plagues, smallpox and tetanus, various lung, intestinal, and venereal diseases, trachoma, typhus, leprosy, yellow fever, and teeth-rotting caries. Smallpox was the first to appear. Must not this unknown and horrible epidemic, which produced burning fever and decomposed the flesh, be a chastisement from the gods? The invaders "moved into Tlaxcala," one native eyewitness reported, "and then the epidemic spread: cough, burning hot pustules." Reported another: "The contagious, oppressive, cruel pustule sickness brought death to many." [8] The Indians died like flies; their organisms had no defense against the new diseases. Those who survived were feeble and useless. The Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro estimates that more than half the aboriginal population of America, Australia, and Oceania died from the contamination of first contact with white men.

"They Crave Gold Like Hungry Swine"

Firing their harquebuses, hacking with their swords, and breathing pestilence, the little band of implacable conquistadores advanced into America. The conquered tell us what it was like. After the Cholula massacre Montezuma sent new envoys to Cortés, who was advancing on the Valley of Mexico. They brought gifts of golden collars and quetzal-bird feather banners. The Spaniards "were in seventh heaven," says the Nahuatl text preserved in the Florentine Codex. "They lifted up the gold as if they were monkeys, with expressions of joy, as if it put new life into them and lit up their hearts. As if it were certainly something for which they yearn with a great thirst. Their bodies fatten on it and they hunger violently for it. They crave gold like hungry swine." Later, when Cortés reached Tenochtitlán, the resplendent Aztec capital with 300,000 inhabitants, the Spaniards entered the treasure house, "and then they made a great ball of the gold and set a fire, putting to the flames all that remained no matter how valuable, so that everything burned. As for the gold, the Spaniards reduced it and made bars."

War followed. Finally Cortés, who had lost Tenochtitlán, reconquered it in 1521: "And by then we had no shields left, no clubs, and nothing to eat, we weren't eating anymore." Montezuma, harried by the priests who accused him of treason, had killed himself. Devastated, burned, and littered with corpses, the city fell: "Shields were its defense, but they were not enough . . ." Cortés had expressed horror at the sacrifices of the Veracruz Indians, who burned children's entrails for a smoke offering to the gods, but there were no limits to his own cruelty in the reconquered city: "And all night long it rained on us." The gallows and torture were not enough, however: the captured treasure never measured up to the Spaniards' imagination, and for years they dug in the lake bottom searching for gold and precious objects presumably hidden by the Indians.

Pedro de Alvarado and his men fell upon Guatemala and "killed so many Indians that it made a river of blood which is called the Olim-

tepeque," and "the day became red because of all the blood there was on that day." Before the decisive battle, "and seeing Indians tortured, they told the Spaniards not to torture them anymore, that the captains Nehaib and Ixquín—Nehaib in the guise of an eagle and of a lion—had much gold, silver, diamonds, and emeralds for them. Then they gave them to the Spaniards and the Spaniards kept them." [9]

Before Pizarro strangled and decapitated Atahualpa, he got from him a ransom of "gold and silver weighing more than 20,000 marks in fine silver and 1,326,000 escudos in the finest gold." Then Pizarro advanced on Cuzco. His soldiers thought they were entering the city of the Caesars, so dazzling was the capital of the empire, but they proceeded without delay to sack the Temple of the Sun. "Struggling and fighting among each other, each trying to get his hands on the lion's share, the soldiers in their coats of mail trampled on jewels and images and pounded the gold utensils with hammers to reduce them to a more portable size. . . . They tossed all the temple's gold into a melting pot to turn it into bars: the laminae that covered the walls, the marvelous representations of trees, birds, and other objects in the garden." [10]

Today in the enormous bare plaza at the center of Mexico City the Catholic cathedral rises on the ruins of Tenochtitlán's greatest temple and the government palace occupies the site where Cuauhtémoc, the Aztec chief martyred by Cortés, had his residence. Tenochtitlán was razed. In Peru, Cuzco suffered the same fate, but the conquistadores could not completely destroy its massive walls and this testimony in stone to the Inca's colossal architecture can still be seen in the bases of the colonial buildings.

The Silver Cycle: The Splendors of Potosí

They say that even the horses were shod with silver in the great days of the city of Potosí. The church altars and the wings of cherubim in processions for the Corpus Christi celebration in 1658, were made of silver: the streets from the cathedral to the church of Recoletos were completely resurfaced with silver bars. In Potosí, silver built temples and palaces, monasteries and gambling dens; it

prompted tragedies and fiestas, led to the spilling of blood and wine, fired avarice, and unleashed extravagance and adventure. The sword and the cross marched together in the conquest and plunder of Latin America, and captains and ascetics, knights and evangelists, soldiers and monks came together in Potosí to help themselves to its silver. Molded into cones and ingots, the viscera of the Cerro Rico—the rich hill—substantially fed the development of Europe. "Worth a Peru" was the highest possible praise of a person or a thing after Pizarro took Cuzco, but once the Cerro had been discovered Don Quixote de la Mancha changed the words: "Worth a Potosí," he says to Sancho. This jugular vein of the viceroyalty, America's fountain of silver, had 120,000 inhabitants by the census of 1573. Only twenty-eight years had passed since the city sprouted out of the Andean wilderness and already, as if by magic, it had the same population as London and more than Seville, Madrid, Rome, or Paris. A new census in 1650 gave Potosí a population of 160,000. It was one of the world's biggest and richest cities, ten times bigger than Boston—at a time when New York had not even begun to call itself by that name.

Potosí's history did not begin with the Spaniards. Before the conquest the Inca Huayna Cápaj had heard his vassals talk of the Sumaj Orcko, the beautiful hill, and he was finally able to see it when, having fallen ill, he had himself taken to the thermal springs of Tarapaya. From the straw-hut village of Cantumarca the Inca's eyes contemplated for the first time that perfect cone which rises proudly between the mountain peaks. He was awestruck by its reddish hues, slender form, and giant size, as people have continued to be through ensuing centuries. But the Inca suspected that it must conceal precious stones and rich metals in its bowels, and he wanted to add new decorations to the Temple of the Sun in Cuzco. The gold and silver that the Incas took from the mines of Colque Porco and Andacaba did not leave the kingdom: they were not used commercially but for the adoration of the gods. Indian miners had hardly dug their flints into the beautiful Cerro's veins of silver when a deep, hollow voice struck them to the ground. Emerging as loud as thunder from the depths of the wilderness, the voice said in Quechua: "This is not for you; God is keeping these riches for those who come from afar." The

Indians fled in terror and the Inca, before departing from the Cerro, changed its name. It became "Potojsi," which means to thunder, burst, explode.

"Those who come from afar" took little time in coming, although Huayna Cápaj was dead by the time the captains of the conquest made their way in. In 1545 the Indian Huallpa, running in pursuit of an escaped llama, had to pass the night on the Cerro. It was intensely cold and he lit a fire. By its light he saw a white and shining vein—pure silver. The Spanish avalanche was unleashed.

Wealth flowed like water. The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, showed his gratitude by bestowing on Potosí the title of Imperial City and a shield with the inscription: "I am rich Potosí, treasure of the world, king of the mountains, envy of kings." Only eleven years after Huallpa's discovery the new-born Imperial City celebrated the coronation of Philip II with twenty-four days of festivities costing eight million *pesos duros*. The Cerro was the most potent of magnets. Hard as life was at its base, at an altitude of nearly 14,000 feet the place was flooded with treasure hunters who took the bitter cold as if it were a tax on living there. Suddenly a rich and disorderly society burst forth beside the silver, and Potosí became "the nerve center of the kingdom," in the words of Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza. By the beginning of the seventeenth century it had thirty-six magnificently decorated churches, thirty-six gambling houses, and fourteen dance academies. Salons, theaters, and fiesta stage-settings had the finest tapestries, curtains, heraldic emblazonry, and wrought gold and silver; multicolored damasks and cloths of gold and silver hung from the balconies of houses. Silks and fabrics came from Granada, Flanders, and Calabria; hats from Paris and London; diamonds from Ceylon; precious stones from India; pearls from Panama; stockings from Naples; crystal from Venice; carpets from Persia; perfumes from Arabia; porcelain from China. The ladies sparkled with diamonds, rubies, and pearls; the gentlemen sported the finest embroidered fabrics from Holland. Bullfights were followed by tilting contests, and love and pride inspired frequent medieval-style duels with emerald-studded, gaudily plumed helmets, gold filigree saddles and stirrups, Toledo swords, and richly caparisoned Chilean ponies.

In 1579 the royal judge Matienzo complained: "There is never a shortage of novelty, scandal, and wantonness." Potosí had at the time 800 professional gamblers and 120 famous prostitutes, whose resplendent salons were thronged with wealthy miners. In 1608 Potosí celebrated the feast of the Holy Sacrament with six days of plays and six nights of masked balls, eight days of bullfights and three of fiestas, two of tournaments and other dissipations.

Spain Owned the Cow, Others Drank the Milk

Between 1545 and 1558 the prolific silver mines of Potosí, in what is now Bolivia, and of Zacatecas and Guanajuato in Mexico, were discovered, and the mercury amalgam process, which made possible the exploitation of the lowest-grade silver, began to be used. The "silver rush" quickly eclipsed gold mining. In the mid-seventeenth century silver constituted more than 99 percent of mineral exports from Spanish America. Latin America was a huge mine, with Potosí as its chief center. Some excessively enthusiastic Bolivian writers insist that in three centuries Spain got enough metal from Potosí to make a silver bridge from the tip of the Cerro to the door of the royal palace across the ocean. This is certainly fanciful, but even the reality stretches one's imagination to the limit: the flow of silver achieved gigantic dimensions. The large-scale clandestine export of Latin American silver as contraband to the Philippines, to China, and to Spain itself is not taken into account by Earl Hamilton, who nevertheless cites, in his well-known work on the subject, astounding figures based on data from the Casa de Contratación in Seville.[11] Between 1503 and 1660, 185,000 kilograms of gold and 16,000,000 of silver arrived at the Spanish port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Silver shipped to Spain in little more than a century and a half exceeded three times the total European reserves—and it must be remembered that these official figures are not complete.

The metals taken from the new colonial dominions not only stimulated Europe's economic development; one may say that they made it possible. Even the effect of the Persian treasure seized and poured into the Hellenic world by Alexander the Great cannot be compared with Latin America's formidable contribution to the progress of other regions. Not, however, to that of Spain, although Spain owned

the sources of Latin American silver. As it used to be said in the seventeenth century, "Spain is like a mouth that receives the food, chews it, and passes it on to the other organs, retaining no more than a fleeting taste of the particles that happen to stick in its teeth." [12] The Spaniards owned the cow, but others drank the milk. The kingdom's creditors, mostly foreigners, systematically emptied the "Green Strongroom" of Seville's Casa de Contratación, which was supposed to guard, under three keys in three different hands, the treasure flowing from Latin America.

The Crown was mortgaged. It owed nearly all of the silver shipments, before they arrived, to German, Genoese, Flemish, and Spanish bankers. The same fate befell most of the duty collected in Spain itself: in 1543, 65 percent of all the royal revenues went to paying annuities on debts. Only in a minimal way did Latin American silver enter the Spanish economy; although formally registered in Seville, it ended in the hands of the Fuggers, the powerful bankers who had advanced to the Pope the funds needed to finish St. Peter's, and of other big moneylenders of the period, such as the Welsers, the Shetzes, and the Grimaldis. The silver also went to paying for the export of *non-Spanish* merchandise to the New World.

The rich empire had a poor metropolis, although the illusion of prosperity blew increasingly large bubbles into the air. The Crown kept opening up new war fronts, while on Spanish soil the aristocracy devoted itself to extravagance, and priests and warriors, nobles and beggars, multiplied as dizzily as living costs and interest rates. Industry died with the birth of great sterile latifundia, and Spain's sick economy could not stand up to the impact of the rising demand for food and merchandise that was the inevitable result of colonial expansion. The big rise in public expenditures and the choking pressure of the overseas possessions' consumer needs accelerated trade deficits and set off galloping inflation. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, French minister of marine under Louis XIV, wrote, "The more business a state does with the Spaniards, the more silver it has." There was a sharp European struggle for the Spanish trade, which brought with it the market and the silver of Latin America. A late-seventeenth-century French document tells us that Spain controlled only 5 percent of the trade with "its" overseas colonial possessions, despite the juridical

mirage of its monopoly: almost a third of the total was in Dutch and Flemish hands, a quarter belonged to the French, the Genoese controlled over one-fifth, the English one-tenth, and the Germans somewhat less. *Latin America was a European business.*

Charles V, heir to the Holy Roman emperors by purchased election, man of jutting chin and idiot gaze, spent only sixteen of his reign's forty years in Spain. Having occupied the throne without knowing a word of Spanish, he governed with a retinue of rapacious Flemings whom he authorized to take out of Spain muletrain-loads of gold and jewels, and whom he showered with bishoprics, bureaucratic titles, and even the first license to ship slaves to the Latin American colonies. Intent on hounding Satan all across Europe, he drained Latin America of its treasure for his religious wars. The Hapsburg dynasty did not collapse with his death; Spain had to suffer them for nearly two centuries. The great leader of the Counter-Reformation was his son, Philip II. From his huge palace-monastery, Escorial, on the slopes of the Sierra de Guadarrama, Philip spread the grim operations of the Inquisition across the world and launched his armies against the centers of heresy. Calvinism had taken hold in Holland, England, and France, and the Turks embodied the peril of a return to the faith of Allah. Spreading the true faith was a costly business: the few gold and silver objects, marvels of Latin American art, that arrived unmelted-down from Mexico and Peru were quickly taken from the Casa de Contratación in Seville and thrown into the crucibles.

At the same time heretics, or those suspected of heresy, were roasted in the Inquisition's purifying flames, Torquemada burned books, and the Devil's tail peeped out from every crevice. The war against Protestantism was also the war against ascendant capitalism in Europe. The "perpetuation of the Crusades," writes J. H. Elliott, "meant the perpetuation of the archaic social organization of a nation of Crusaders." The metals of Latin America—the delirium and downfall of Spain—provided a means to fight against the nascent forces of the modern economy. Charles V had already defeated the Castilian bourgeoisie in the uprisings of the Comuneros, which had become a social revolution against the nobility, its property and privileges. The uprisings were crushed following the betrayal of the city

of Burgos, which would be Francisco Franco's capital four centuries later. With the last rebel fires extinguished, Charles returned to Spain accompanied by four thousand German soldiers. At the same time, the highly radical insurrection of weavers, spinners, and artisans, who had taken power in the city of Valencia and had extended it through the whole district, was drowned in blood.

Defense of the Catholic faith turned out to be a mask for the struggle against history. The expulsion of the Jews in the time of Ferdinand and Isabella had deprived Spain of many able artisans and of indispensable capital. The expulsion of the Arabs in 1609 is considered less important, although no fewer than 275,000 Moors were put over the border, disastrously effecting the economy of Valencia and ruining the fertile Aragonese lands south of the Ebro. Previously, Philip II had thrown out thousands of Flemish artisans guilty or suspected of Protestantism. England welcomed them and they made a solid contribution to that country's manufactures.

It is clear that the enormous distances and the difficulty of communication were not the main obstacles to Spain's industrial progress. Spanish capitalists became no more than rentiers through the purchase of titles to Crown debts, and did not invest their capital in industrial development. The economic surplus went into unproductive channels: the old wealthy class, the *señores* of gallows and knife, the owners of land and titles of nobility, built palaces and accumulated jewels; the new rich, speculators and merchants, bought land and titles. Neither the one nor the other paid taxes worth mentioning, nor could they be imprisoned for debt. Anyone devoting himself to industrial activity automatically lost his membership in the gentleman's club.

Successive commercial treaties, signed after Spain's military defeats in Europe, gave concessions that stimulated maritime trade between the port of Cádiz, where Latin America's metals were landed, and French, English, Dutch, and Hanseatic ports. Every year from eight hundred to a thousand ships unloaded in Spain the products of other countries' industries. They reloaded with Latin American silver and Spanish wool that went to foreign looms, whence it would be returned already woven by the expanding European industry. The

Cádiz monopolists merely forwarded foreign industrial products, which were then shipped to the New World: if Spanish manufactures could not even supply the home market, how could they satisfy the needs of the colonies?

The laces of Lille and Arras, Dutch fabrics, Brussels tapestries, Florentine brocades, Venetian crystal, Milanese arms, and French wines and cloths swamped the Spanish market, at the expense of local production, to satisfy the ostentation and consumer demands of ever more numerous and powerful parasites in ever poorer countries. Industry died in the egg, and the Hapsburgs did their best to speed its demise. The process reached its height in the mid-sixteenth century when importation of foreign textiles was authorized and all export of Castilian fabrics was banned except to Latin America. In contrast, as Jorge Abelardo Ramos has noted, were the policies of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I in England, when in that ascendant nation they banned the export of gold and silver, monopolized letters of credit, stopped wool exports, and ousted the North Sea merchants of the Hanseatic League from British ports. Meanwhile, the Italian republics were protecting their industry and external commerce through tariffs, privileges, and rigorous prohibitions: craftsmen could not leave the country under pain of death.

Everything went to rack and ruin. Of sixteen thousand looms in Seville on Charles V's death in 1558, only four hundred remained when Philip II died forty years later. The seven million sheep in Andalusian flocks were reduced to two million. In *Don Quixote de la Mancha*—which was banned for a long time in Latin America—Cervantes drew a portrait of the society of his time. A mid-sixteenth-century decree stopped the importation of foreign books and barred students from taking courses outside Spain; the Salamanca student body was reduced by half in a few decades; there were 9,000 convents and the clergy multiplied almost as fast as the cloak-and-sword nobility; 160,000 foreigners monopolized foreign trade; and the squanderings of the aristocracy condemned Spain to economic impotence. Around 1630, 150-odd dukes, marquises, counts, and viscounts garnered five million ducats in annual rents, adding ever more frills to their fancy titles. The Duke of Medinaceli had seven hundred servants and the

Duke of Osuna, to score off the Tsar of Russia, dressed his three hundred in leather cloaks.* The seventeenth century was the time of the *pícaro*, the rogue, and of hunger and epidemics. Spain had countless beggars, but this did not discourage an influx of foreign beggars from every corner of Europe. By 1700 there were 625,000 *hidalgos*, knights of the battlefield, although the country was emptying: its population had dwindled by half in somewhat more than two centuries, and was equal to that of England, which had doubled in the same period. The Hapsburg regime finally ended in 1700 amid total bankruptcy. Chronic unemployment, idle latifundios, chaotic currency, ruined industry, lost wars, empty coffers, central authority ignored in the provinces: the Spain that Philip V faced was "hardly less defunct than its dead master." [13]

The Bourbons gave Spain a more modern look, but at the end of the eighteenth century there were two hundred thousand clergymen and the unproductive population continued to proliferate at the expense of the country's underdevelopment. Over ten thousand towns and cities were still subject to the seignorial jurisdiction of the nobility and thus outside the king's direct control. The latifundia and the institution of entailed estates remained intact, along with obscurantism and fatalism. Nothing had improved since the era of Philip IV when a group of theologians, examining a project for a canal between the Manzanares and the Tagus, had ended their deliberations by declaring that if God had wanted the rivers to be navigable, He himself would have so arranged it.

The Distribution of Functions Between Horseman and Horse

Marx wrote in Chapter 3 of the first volume of *Capital*: "The dis-

* The species is not yet extinct. I opened a Madrid magazine at the end of 1969 and read of the death of Doña Teresa Beltrán de Lis y Pidal Gorouski y Chico de Guzmán, Duchess of Albuquerque and Marchioness of the Alcañices and Balbases. She is mourned by the widower Duke of Albuquerque, Don Beltrán Alonso Osorio y Diez de Rivera Martos y Figueroa, Marquis of the Alcañices, of the Balbases, of Cadreita, of Cuéllar, of Cullera, of Montaos, Count of Fuensaldaña, of Grajal, of Huelma, of Ledesma, of La Torre, of Villanueva de Cañedo, of Villahumbrosa, thrice Grandee of Spain.

covery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation."

Plunder, internal and external, was the most important means of primitive accumulation of capital, an accumulation which, after the Middle Ages, made possible a new historical stage in world economic evolution. As the money economy extended, more and more social strata and regions of the world became involved in unequal exchange. Ernest Mandel has added up the value of the gold and silver torn from Latin America up to 1660, the booty extracted from Indonesia by the Dutch East India Company from 1650 to 1780, the harvest reaped by French capital in the eighteenth-century slave trade, the profits from slave labor in the British Antilles and from a half-century of British looting in India. The total exceeds the capital invested in all European industrial enterprises operated by steam in about 1800.[14] This enormous mass of capital, Mandel notes, created a favorable climate for investment in Europe, stimulated the "spirit of enterprise," and directly financed the establishment of manufactures, which in turn gave a strong thrust to the Industrial Revolution. But at the same time the formidable international concentration of wealth for Europe's benefit prevented the jump into the accumulation of industrial capital in the plundered areas: "The double tragedy of the developing countries consists in the fact that they were not only victims of that process of international concentration, but that subsequently they have had to try and compensate for their industrial backwardness—that is, realize the primitive accumulation of industrial capital—in a world flooded with articles manufactured by an already mature industry, that of the West." [15]

The Latin American colonies were discovered, conquered, and colonized within the process of the expansion of commercial capital. Europe stretched out its arms to clasp the whole world. Neither Spain nor Portugal received the benefits of the sweeping advance of capitalist mercantilism, although it was their colonies that substantially supplied the gold and silver feeding this expansion. As we have

seen, while Latin America's precious metals made deceptive fortunes for a Spanish nobility living in a belated and contra-historical Middle Age, they simultaneously sealed the ruin of Spain in centuries to come. It was in other parts of Europe that modern capitalism could be incubated, taking decisive advantage of the expropriation of primitive American peoples. The rape of accumulated treasure was followed by the systematic exploitation of the forced labor of Indians and abducted Africans in the mines.

Europe needed gold and silver. The money in circulation kept multiplying and it was necessary to stimulate the movement of capitalism in the hour of birth: the bourgeoisie took control of the cities and founded banks, produced and exchanged merchandise, conquered new markets. Gold, silver, sugar: the colonial economy, supplying rather than consuming, was built in terms of—and at the service of—the European market. During long periods of the sixteenth century the value of Latin American precious metal exports was four times greater than the value of the slaves, salt, and luxury goods it imported. The resources flowed out so that emergent European nations across the ocean could accumulate them. This was the basic mission of the pioneers, although they applied the Bible almost as often as the whip to the dying Indians. The Spanish colonies' economic structure was born subordinated to the external market and was thus centralized around the export sector, where profit and power were concentrated.

During the process, from the metals stage to that of supplying foodstuffs, each region became identified with what it produced, and each produced what Europe wanted of it: *each product, loaded in the holds of galleons plowing the ocean, became a vocation and a destiny.* The international division of labor, as it emerged along with capitalism, resembled the distribution of function between a horseman and a horse, as Paul Baran put it. The markets of the colonial world grew as mere appendices to the internal market of invading capitalism.

Celso Furtado notes that while most of Europe's feudal seigneurs obtained an economic surplus from the people they dominated and used it in one way or another in the same areas, the chief aim of those Spaniards who received Latin American mines, lands, and Indians from the king was to extract a surplus to send to Europe.[16] This observation helps explain the ultimate goal of the Latin American colonial economy from its inception: although it showed some feudal characteristics, it functioned at the service of capitalism developing elsewhere. Nor, indeed, can the existence of wealthy capitalist centers in our own time be explained without the existence of poor and subjected outskirts: the one and the other make up the same system.

But not all of the surplus went to Europe. The colonial economy was run by merchants, by owners of mines and of big estates, who divided up the usufruct of Indian and black labor under the jealous and omnipotent eye of the Crown and its chief associate, the Church. Power was concentrated in the hands of a few, who sent metals and foodstuffs to Europe and received back the luxury goods to the enjoyment of which they dedicated their mushrooming fortunes. The dominant classes took no interest whatever in diversifying the internal economies or in raising technical and cultural levels in the population: they had a different function within the international complex they were acting for, and the grinding poverty of the people—so profitable from the standpoint of the reigning interests—prevented the development of an internal consumer market.

One French economist argues that Latin America's worst colonial legacy, which explains its backwardness today, is lack of capital.[17] But all the historical evidence shows that the colonial economy produced bountiful wealth for the classes connected internally with the colonial system of domination. The labor that was abundantly available for nothing or practically nothing, and the great European demand for Latin American products, made possible "a precocious and abundant accumulation of capital in the Iberian colonies. The hard core of beneficiaries, far from growing, became smaller in proportion to the mass of the population, as may be seen from the well-known fact that unemployed Europeans and Creoles constantly increased." [18] The capital that stayed in Latin America, after the lion's share went into the primitive accumulation process of European capitalism, did not generate a process similar to that which took place in Europe, where the foundations of industrial development were laid. It was diverted instead into the construction of great palaces and showy churches, into the purchase of jewels and luxurious clothing

and furniture, into the maintenance of flocks of servants, and into the extravagance of fiestas. To an important extent this surplus was also immobilized in the purchase of new lands, or continued to revolve around speculative commercial activities.

In the twilight of the colonial era Alexander von Humboldt found in Mexico an enormous amount of capital in the hands of mine owners and merchants, while no less than half of Mexican real estate and capital belonged to the Church, which also controlled much of the remaining land through mortgages.[19] Mexican mine operators invested their surpluses in the purchase of great latifundia and in mortgage loans, as did the big exporters of Veracruz and Acapulco; the Church hierarchy multiplied its possessions in similar fashion. Palatial residences sprang up in the capital, and sumptuous churches appeared like mushrooms after rain; Indian servants catered to the golden luxuries of the powerful.

In mid-seventeenth-century Peru, capital amassed by *encomenderos*,* mine operators, inquisitors, and officials of the imperial government was poured into commercial projects. The fortunes made in Venezuela from growing cacao—begun at the end of the sixteenth century and produced by applying whips to the backs of black slaves—were invested in new plantations, other commercial crops, in mines, urban real estate, slaves, and herds of cattle.

The Silver Cycle: The Ruin of Potosí

Andre Gunder Frank, in analyzing "metropolis-satellite" relations through Latin American history as a chain of successive subjections, has highlighted the fact that the regions now most underdeveloped and poverty-stricken are those which in the past had had the closest links with the metropolis and had enjoyed periods of boom.[20] Having once been the biggest producers of goods exported to Europe, or later to the United States, and the richest sources of capital, they were abandoned by the metropolis when for this or that reason business sagged. Potosí is the outstanding example of this descent into the vacuum.

* An *encomienda* was an estate granted by the Crown to the Spanish conquistadores and colonists for their services to Spain. It included the services of the Indians living on it. The *encomendero* was thus the owner. (Trans.)

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Cerro Rico of Potosí (Mexico's Guanajuato and Zacatecas silver mines had their boom much later) was the hub of Latin American colonial life: around it, in one way or another, revolved the Chilean economy, which sent it wheat, dried meat, hides, and wines; the cattle-raising and crafts of Córdoba and Tucumán in Argentina, which supplied it with draft animals and textiles; the mercury mines of Huancavelica; and the Arica region whence the silver was shipped to Lima, chief administrative center of the period. In the independence period the area, now a part of Bolivia, still had a larger population than what is now Argentina. A century and a half later Bolivia's population is almost six times smaller than Argentina's.

Potosían society, sick with ostentation and extravagance, left Bolivia with only a vague memory of its splendors, of the ruins of its churches and palaces, and of eight million Indian corpses. Any one of the diamonds encrusted in a rich *caballero*'s shield was worth more than what an Indian could earn in his whole life under the *mitayo*,* but the *caballero* took off with the diamonds. If it were not a futile exercise, Bolivia—now one of the world's most poverty-stricken countries—could boast of having nourished the wealth of the wealthiest. In our time Potosí is a poor city in a poor Bolivia: "The city which has given most to the world and has the least," as an old Potosían lady, enveloped in a mile of alpaca shawl, told me when we talked on the Andalusian patio of her two-century-old house. Condemned to nostalgia, tortured by poverty and cold, Potosí remains an open wound of the colonial system in America: a still audible "J'accuse."

The people live off the refuse. In 1640 the priest Alvaro Alonso Barba published in Madrid's royal printshop his excellent work on the art of metals.[21] Tin, he wrote, "is poison." He mentioned the Cerro, where "there is much tin, although few recognize it, and people throw it aside looking for the silver everyone seeks." Today the

* A *mitayo* is an Indian who pays a *mita*, or tribute, usually in the form of forced labor in public works, especially the mines. (Trans.)

tin the Spaniards discarded like garbage is exploited in Potosí. Walls of ancient houses are sold as high-grade tin. Through the centuries the wealth has been drained from the five thousand tunnels the Spaniards bored into the Cerro Rico. As dynamite charges have hollowed it out, its color has changed and the height of its summit has been lowered. The mountains of rock heaped around the many tunnel openings are of all colors: pink, lilac, purple, ochre, gray, gold, brown. A crazy quilt of garbage. *Llamperos* break the rocks and Indian *palliris* in search of tin pick like birds, with hands skilled in weighing and separating, at the mineral debris. Miners still enter old mines that are not flooded, carbide lamps in hand, bodies crouching, to bring out whatever there is. Of silver there is none. Not a glint of it: the Spaniards even swept out the seams with brooms. The *pallacos* use pick and shovel to dig any metal out of the leavings. "The Cerro is still rich," I was blandly told by an unemployed man who was scratching through the dirt with his hands. "There must be a God, you know: the metal grows just like a plant." Opposite the Cerro Rico rises a witness to the devastation: a mountain called Huakajchi, meaning in Quechua "the *cerro* that has wept." From its sides gush many springs of pure water, the "water eyes" that quench the miners' thirst.

In its mid-seventeenth-century days of glory the city attracted many painters and artisans, Spanish and Indian, European and Creole masters and Indian image-carvers who left their mark on Latin American colonial art. Melchor Pérez de Holguín, Latin America's El Greco, left an enormous religious work which betrays both its creator's talent and the pagan breath of these lands: his splendid Virgin, arms open, gives one breast to the infant Jesus and the other to Saint Joseph; she is hauntingly memorable. Goldsmiths, silversmiths, and engravers, cabinetmakers and masters of repoussé, craftsmen in metals, fine woods, plaster, and noble ivory adorned Potosí's many churches and monasteries with works of the imaginative colonial school, altars sparkling with silver filigree, and priceless pulpits and reredoses. The baroque church façades carved in stone have resisted the ravages of time, but not so the paintings, many of them irreparably damaged by damp, or the smaller figures and objects. Tourists and parishioners have emptied the churches of whatever they could

carry, from chalices and bells to carvings in beech and ash of Saint Francis and Christ.

These untended churches, now mostly closed, are collapsing under the weight of years. It is a pity, for pillaged as they have been they are still formidable treasures of a colonial art that fuses all styles and glows with heretical imagination: the *escalonado* emblem of the ancient civilization of Tiahuanaco instead of the cross of Christ, the cross joined with the sacred sun and moon, virgins and saints with "natural" hair, grapes and ears of corn twining to the tops of columns along with the *kantuta*, the imperial flower of the Incas; sirens, Bacchus, and the festival of life alternating with romantic asceticism, the dark faces of some divinities, caryatids with Indian features. Some churches have been renovated to perform other services now that they lack congregations. San Ambrosio is the Cine Omiste; in February 1970 the forthcoming attraction was advertised across the baroque bas-reliefs of the façade: *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World.* The Jesuit church became a movie house, then a Grace Company warehouse, and finally a storehouse for public charity food.

A few other churches still function as best they can: it is at least a century and a half since Potosíans had the money to burn candles. It is said of the San Francisco church, for example, that its cross grows several centimeters every year, as does the beard of the Señor de la Vera Cruz, an imposing silver-and-silk Christ who appeared in Potosí, brought by nobody, four centuries ago. The priests do not deny that they shave him every so often, and they attribute to him—even in writing—every kind of miracle: incantations, down the centuries, against droughts, plagues, and wars in defense of the beleaguered city.

The Señor de la Vera Cruz was powerless to stop the decline of Potosí. The depletion of the silver was interpreted as divine judgment on the miners' wickedness and sin. Spectacular masses became a thing of the past: like the banquets, bullfights, balls, and fireworks, luxury religion had, after all, been a subproduct of Indian slave labor. In the era of splendor the miners made princely donations to churches and monasteries and sponsored sumptuous funerals, all solid silver keys to the gates of heaven. In 1559 the merchant Alvaro Bejarano directed in his will that "all the priests in Potosí" accom-

pany his corpse. Quack medicine and witchcraft were mixed with authorized religion in the delirious fervors and panics of colonial society. Extreme unction with bell and canopy could, like Communion, succor the dying; but a juicy will that provided for building a church or for a silver altar could prove much more effective. Fevers were combated with the gospels. In certain convents prayers cooled the body, in others they warmed it: "The Credo was cool as tamarind or sweet spirit of nitre, the Salve warm as orange blossoms or cornsilk." [22]

In the Calle Chuquisaca one can admire the time-corroded façade of the palace of the counts of Carma y Cayara, but it is now a dentist's office; the coat-of-arms of Maestro de Campo Don Antonio López de Quiroga, in the Calle Lanza, now adorns a little school; that of the Marquis de Otavi, with its rampant lions, tops the doorway of the Banco Nacional. "Where can they be living now? They must have gone far . . ." The Potosían old lady, attached to her city, tells me that the rich left first and then the poor: in four centuries the population has decreased threefold. I gaze at the Cerro from a roof in the Calle Uyuni, a narrow, twisting colonial lane with wooden-balconied houses so close together that residents can kiss or hit each other without having to go down to the street. Here, as in all of the city, survive the old street lamps under whose feeble light, as Jaime Molins relates, "lovers' quarrels were resolved, and muffled *caballeros,* elegant ladies, and gamblers flitted by like ghosts." The city now has electric light but one barely notices it. In the dim plazas raffle parties are conducted at night under the ancient lamps: I saw a piece of cake being raffled in the middle of a crowd.

Sucre decayed along with Potosí. This valley city of pleasant climate, successively known as Charcas, La Plata, and Chuquisaca, enjoyed a good share of the wealth flowing from Potosí's Cerro Rico. Here Francisco Pizarro's brother Gonzalo installed his court, as sumptuous as any king's; churches and spacious residences, parks and recreation centers sprouted continuously, together with the lawyers, mystics, and pretentious poets who put their stamp on the city from century to century. "Silence, that is Sucre—just silence. But before . . ." Before, this was the cultural capital of two viceroyalties, seat of Latin America's chief archdiocese and of the colony's highest

court of justice—the most magnificent and cultured city in South America. Doña Cecilia Contreras de Torres and Doña María de las Mercedes Torralba de Gramajo, *señoras* of Ubina and Colquechaca, gave Lucullan banquets in a contest to squander the income from their Potosí mines. When their lavish fiestas ended they threw the silver service and even golden vessels from their balconies to be picked up by lucky passers-by.

Sucre still has an Eiffel Tower and its own Arcs de Triomphe, and they say that the jewels of its Virgin would pay off the whole of Bolivia's huge external debt. But the famous church bells, which in 1809 rang out joyfully for Latin America's emancipation, play a funereal tune today. The harsh chimes of San Francisco, which so often announced uprisings and rebellions, toll a death knell over torpid Sucre. It matters little that Sucre is Bolivia's legal capital, still the seat of its highest court. Through its streets pass countless pettifogging lawyers, shriveled and yellow of skin, surviving testimonies to its decadence: learned doctors of the type who wear pince-nez complete with black ribbon. From the great empty palaces Sucre's illustrious patriarchs send out their servants to sell baked tidbits down at the railroad station. In happier times there were people here who could buy anything up to the title of prince.

Only ghosts of the old wealth haunt Potosí and Sucre. In Huanchaca, another Bolivian tragedy, Anglo-Chilean capitalists in the past century stripped veins of highest-grade silver more than two yards wide; all that remains is dusty ruin. Huanchaca is still on the map as if it continued to exist—identified by crossed pick and shovel as a live mining center. Did the Mexican mines of Guanajuato and Zacatecas enjoy a better fate? On the basis of Alexander von Humboldt's figures in his already cited *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain,* the economic surplus drained from Mexico between 1760 and 1809—barely half a century—through silver and gold exports has been estimated at some five billion present-day dollars.[23] In Humboldt's time there were no more important mines in Latin America. The great German scholar compared Guanajuato's Valenciana mine with the Himmelsfürst in Saxony, then the richest in Europe; the Valenciana was producing thirty-six times more silver at the turn of the century and its profits were thirty-three times as great for its inves-

tors. Count Santiago de la Laguna trembled with emotion in describing, in 1732, the Zacatecas mining district and "the precious treasures concealed in its deep womb," in mountains "graced with more than four thousand shafts, the better to serve both of Their Majesties," God and the King, "with the fruit of its entrails," and that "all might come to drink and participate of the great, the rich, the learned, the urban and the noble" because it was a "fount of wisdom, order, arms, and nobility." [24] The priest Marmolejo would later describe the city of Guanajuato, crisscrossed by rivers and bridges, with its gardens recalling those of Semiramis in Babylon and its ornate churches, theater, bullring, cockfight arenas, and towers and cupolas rising against the green mountainsides. But this was "the country of inequality," about which Humboldt could write: "Perhaps nowhere is inequality more shocking . . . The architecture of public and private buildings, the women's elegant wardrobes, the high-society atmosphere: all testify to an extreme social polish which is in extraordinary contrast to the nakedness, ignorance, and coarseness of the populace." The new veins of silver gobbled up men and mules in the *cordillera* foothills; the Indians, who "lived from day to day," suffered chronic hunger and epidemics killed them off like flies. In only one year, 1784, more than eight thousand died in Guanajuato when a lack of food, the result of a bad cold spell, set off a wave of disease.

Capital, far from accumulating, was squandered. There was a saying: "Father a merchant, son a gentleman, grandson a beggar." In a plea to the government in 1843 Mexican politician Lucas Alamán gave a sombre warning and insisted on the need to defend national industry by banning or imposing heavy duties on foreign imports. "We must proceed to develop industry as the only source of general prosperity," he wrote. "The riches of Zacatecas would bring no benefits to Puebla but for the former's consumption of the latter's manufactures, and if these decline again, as has happened before, that presently flourishing area will be ruined and the riches of the mines will not be able to save it from poverty." The prophesy proved true. In our time Zacatecas and Guanajuato are not even the most important cities in their own regions. Both languish amid the skeletons of the camps of the mining boom. Zacatecas, high and arid, lives from

agriculture and exports labor to other states; its gold and silver are low in quality compared to former days. Of the fifty mines once exploited in the Guanajuato district, only two remain today. The population of the beautiful city does not grow, but tourists flock there to view the exuberant splendor of olden times. San Diego, La Valenciana, La Compañia, the cemetery in whose catacombs over one hundred mummies, preserved intact by the salinity of the soil, are on show. Half the families in Guanajuato state average more than five members and live today in one-room hovels.

A Flood of Tears and Blood: And Yet the Pope Said Indians Had Souls

In 1581 Philip II told the *audiencia** of Guadalajara that a third of Latin America's Indians had already been wiped out, and that those who survived were compelled to pay the tributes for the dead. The monarch added that Indians were bought and sold; that they slept in the open air; and that mothers killed their children to save them from the torture of the mines.[25] Yet the Crown's hypocrisy had smaller limits than the empire: it received a fifth of the value of the metals extracted by its subjects in all of the Spanish New World, as well as other taxes, and the Portuguese Crown was to have the same arrangement in eighteenth-century Brazil. Latin American silver and gold—as Engels put it—penetrated like a corrosive acid through all the pores of Europe's moribund feudal society, and, for the benefit of nascent mercantilist capitalism, the mining entrepreneurs turned Indians and black slaves into a teeming "external proletariat" of the European economy. Greco-Roman slavery was revived in a different world; to the plight of the Indians of the exterminated Latin American civilizations was added the ghastly fate of the blacks seized from African villages to toil in Brazil and the Antilles. The colonial Latin American economy enjoyed the most highly concentrated labor force known until that time, making possible the greatest concentration of wealth ever enjoyed by any civilization in world history.

* An *audencia* was a judicial district as well as a judicial, administrative, and advisory body. In Mexico, it was the supreme court of administration and judgment. (Trans.)

The price of the tide of avarice, terror, and ferocity bearing down on these regions was Indian genocide: the best recent investigations credit pre-Columbian Mexico with a population between 30 and 37.5 million, and the Andean region is estimated to have possessed a similar number; Central America had between 10 and 13 million. Aztecs, Incas, and Mayas totaled between 70 and 90 million when the foreign conquerors appeared on the horizon; a century and a half later they had been reduced to 3.5 million. In 1685 only 4,000 Indian families remained of the more than 2 million that had once lived between Lima and Paita, according to the Marquis of Barinas. Archbishop Liñán y Cisneros denied that the Indians had been annihilated: "The truth is that they are hiding out," he said, "to avoid paying tribute, abusing the liberty which they enjoy and which they never had under the Incas." [26]

While metals flowed unceasingly from Latin American mines, equally unceasing were the orders from the Spanish Court granting paper protection and dignity to the Indians whose killing labor sustained the kingdom. The fiction of legality protected the Indian; the reality of exploitation drained the blood from his body. From slavery to the *encomienda* of service, and from this to the *encomienda* of tribute and the regime of wages, variants in the Indian labor force's juridical condition made only superficial changes in the real situation. The Crown regarded the inhuman exploitation of Indian labor as so necessary that in 1601 Philip III, banning forced labor in the mines by decree, at the same time sent secret instructions ordering its continuation "in case that measure should reduce production." [27] Similarly, between 1616 and 1619, Governor Juan de Solórzano carried out a survey of work conditions in the Huancavélica mercury mines (directly exploited by the Crown, in distinction to the silver mines, which were in private hands): "The poison penetrated to the very marrow, debilitating all the members and causing a constant shaking, and the workers usually died within four years," he reported to the Council of the Indies and to the king. But in 1631 Philip IV ordered that the same system be continued, and his successor Charles II later reaffirmed the decree.

In three centuries Potosí's Cerro Rico consumed eight million lives. The Indians, including women and children, were torn from

their agricultural communities and driven to the Cerro. Of every ten who went up into the freezing wilderness, seven never returned. Luis Capoche, an owner of mines and mills, wrote that "the roads were so covered with people that the whole kingdom seemed on the move." In their communities the Indians saw "many afflicted women returning without husbands and with many orphaned children" and they knew that "a thousand deaths and disasters" awaited them in the mines. The Spaniards scoured the countryside for hundreds of miles for labor. Many died on the way, before reaching Potosí, but it was the terrible work conditions in the mine that killed the most people. Soon after the mine began operating, in 1550, the Dominican monk Domingo de Santo Tomás told the Council of the Indies that Potosí was a "mouth of hell" which swallowed Indians by the thousands every year, and that rapacious mine owners treated them "like stray animals." Later Fray Rodrigo de Loaysa said: "These poor Indians are like sardines in the sea. Just as other fish pursue the sardines to seize and devour them, so everyone in these lands pursues the wretched Indians." Chiefs of Indian communities had to replace the constantly dying *mitayos* with new men between eighteen and fifty years old. The huge stone-walled corral where Indians were assigned to mine and mill owners is now used by workers as a football ground. The *mitayos'* jail—a shapeless mass of ruins—can still be seen at the entrance to Potosí.

The Compilation of the Laws of the Indies abounds with decrees establishing the equal right of Indians and Spaniards to exploit the mines, and expressly forbidding any infringement of Indian rights. Thus formal history—the dead letter of today which perpetuates the dead letter of the past—has nothing to complain about, but while Indian labor legislation was debated in endless documents and Spanish jurists displayed their talents in an explosion of ink, in Latin America the law "was respected but not carried out." In practice "the poor Indian is a coin with which one can get whatever one needs, as with gold and silver, and get it better," as Luis Capoche put it. Many people claimed mestizo status before the courts to avoid being sent to the mines and sold and resold in the market.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Concolorcorvo, who had Indian blood, denied his own people: "We do not dispute that the

mines consume a considerable number of Indians, but this is not due to the work they do in the silver and mercury mines but to their dissolute way of life." The testimony of Capoche, who had many Indians in his service, is more enlightening. Freezing outdoor temperatures alternated with the infernal heat inside the Cerro. The Indians went into the depths "and it is common to bring them out dead or with broken heads and legs, and in the mills they are injured every day." The *mitayos* hacked out the metal with picks and then carried it up on their shoulders by the light of a candle. Outside the mine they propelled the heavy wooden shafts in the mill or melted the silver on a fire after grinding and washing it.

The *mita* labor system was a machine for crushing Indians. The process of using mercury to extract silver poisoned as many or more than did the toxic gases in the bowels of the earth. It made hair and teeth fall out and brought on uncontrollable trembling. The victims ended up dragging themselves through the streets pleading for alms. At night six thousand fires burned on the slopes of the Cerro and in these the silver was worked, taking advantage of the wind that the "glorious Saint Augustine" sent from the sky. Because of the smoke from the ovens there were no pastures or crops for a radius of twenty miles around Potosí and the fumes attacked men's bodies no less relentlessly.

Ideological justifications were never in short supply. The bleeding of the New World became an act of charity, an argument for the faith. With the guilt, a whole system of rationalizations for guilty consciences was devised. The Indians were used as beasts of burden because they could carry a greater weight than the delicate llama, and this proved that they were in fact beasts of burden. The viceroy of Mexico felt that there was no better remedy for their "natural wickedness" than work in the mines. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, a renowned Spanish theologian, argued that they deserved the treatment they got because their sins and idolatries were an offense to God. The Count de Buffon, a French naturalist, noted that Indians were cold and weak creatures in whom "no activity of the soul" could be observed. The Abbé De Paw invented a Latin America where degenerate Indians lived side by side with dogs that couldn't bark, cows that couldn't be eaten, and impotent camels. Voltaire's Latin America

was inhabited by Indians who were lazy and stupid, pigs with navels on their backs, and bald and cowardly lions. Bacon, De Maistre, Montesquieu, Hume, and Bodin declined to recognize the "degraded men" of the New World as fellow humans. Hegel spoke of Latin America's physical and spiritual impotence and said the Indians died when Europe merely breathed on them.

In the seventeenth century Father Gregorio García detected Semitic blood in the Indians because, like the Jews, "they are lazy, they do not believe in the miracles of Jesus Christ, and they are ungrateful to the Spaniards for all the good they have done them." At least this holy man did not deny that the Indians were descended from Adam and Eve: many theologians and thinkers had never been convinced by Pope Paul III's bull of 1537 declaring the Indians to be "true men." When Bartolomé de las Casas upset the Spanish Court with his heated denunciations of the conquistadores' cruelty in 1557, a member of the Royal Council replied that Indians were too low in the human scale to be capable of receiving the faith. Las Casas dedicated his zealous life to defending the Indians against the excesses of the mine owners and *encomenderos*. He once remarked that the Indians preferred to go to hell to avoid meeting Christians.

Indians were assigned or given in *encomienda* to conquistadores and colonizers so that they could teach them the gospel. But since the Indians owed personal services and economic tribute to the *encomenderos*, there was little time for setting them on the Christian path to salvation.

Indians were divided up along with lands given as royal grants, or were obtained by direct plunder: in reward for his services, Cortés received twenty-three thousand vassals. After 1536 Indians were given in *encomienda* along with their descendants for the span of two lifetimes, those of the *encomendero* and of his immediate heir; after 1629 this was extended to three lifetimes and, after 1704, to four. In the eighteenth century the surviving Indians still assured many generations to come of a cozy life. Since their defeated gods persisted in Spanish memory, there were saintly rationalizations aplenty for the victors' profits from their toil; the Indians were pagans and deserved nothing better.

The past? Four hundred years after the papal bull, in September

1957, the highest court in Paraguay published a notice informing all the judges of the country that "the Indians, like other inhabitants of the republic, are human beings." And the Center for Anthropological Studies of the Catholic University of Asunción later carried out a revealing survey, both in the capital and in the countryside: eight out of ten Paraguayans think that "Indians are animals." In Caaguazú, Alta Paraná, and the Chaco, Indians are hunted down like wild beasts, sold at bargain prices, and exploited by a system of virtual slavery—yet almost all Paraguayans have Indian blood, and Paraguayans tirelessly compose poems, songs, and speeches in homage to the "Guaraní soul."

The Militant Memory of Tupac Amaru

When the Spaniards invaded Latin America, the theocratic Inca empire was at its height, spreading over what we now call Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, taking in part of Colombia and Chile, and reaching northern Argentina and the Brazilian jungle. The Aztec confederation had achieved a high level of efficiency in the Valley of Mexico, and in Yucatan and Central America the remarkable civilization of the Mayas, organized for work and war, persisted among the peoples who succeeded them.

These societies have left many testimonies to their greatness despite the long period of devastation: religious monuments built with more skill than the Egyptian pyramids, technically efficient constructions for the battle against nature, art works showing indomitable talent. In the Lima museum there are hundreds of skulls which have undergone trepanning and the insertion of gold and silver plates by Inca surgeons. The Mayans were great astronomers, measuring time and space with astonishing precision, and discovered the value of the figure zero before any other people in history. The Aztecs' irrigation works and artificial islands dazzled Cortés—even though they were not made of gold.

The conquest shattered the foundations of these civilizations. The installation of a mining economy had direr consequences than the fire and sword of war. The mines required a great displacement of people and dislocated agricultural communities; they not only took

countless lives through forced labor, but also indirectly destroyed the collective farming system. The Indians were taken to the mines, were forced to submit to the service of the *encomenderos*, and were made to surrender for nothing the lands which they had to leave or neglect. On the Pacific coast the Spaniards destroyed or let die out the enormous plantations of corn, yucca, kidney and white beans, peanuts, and sweet potato; the desert quickly devoured great tracts of land which the Inca irrigation network had made abundant. Four and a half centuries after the Conquest only rocks and briars remain where roads had once united an empire. Although the Incas' great public works were for the most part destroyed by time or the usurper's hand, one may still see across the Andean *cordillera* traces of the endless terraces which permitted, and still permit, cultivation of the mountainsides. A U.S. technician estimated in 1936 that if the Inca terraces had been built by modern methods at 1936 wage rates they would have cost some $30,000 per acre.[28] In that empire which did not know the wheel, the horse, or iron, the terraces and aqueducts were made possible by prodigious organization and technical perfection achieved through wise distribution of labor, as well as by the religious force that ruled man's relation with the soil—which was sacred and thus always alive.

The Aztecs also responded in a remarkable way to nature's challenges. The surviving islands in the dried-up lake where Mexico City now rises on native ruins are known to tourists today as "floating gardens." The Aztecs created these because of the shortage of land in the place chosen for establishing Tenochtitlán. They moved large quantities of mud from the banks and shored up the new mud-islands between narrow walls of reeds until tree roots gave them firmness. Between these exceptionally fertile islands flowed the canals, and on them arose the great Aztec capital, with its broad avenues, its austerely beautiful palaces, and its stepped pyramids: rising magically out of the lake, it was condemned to disappear under the assaults of foreign conquest. Mexico took four centuries to regain the population of those times.

As Darcy Ribeiro puts it, the Indians were the fuel of the colonial productive system. "It is almost certain," writes Sergio Bagú, "that hundreds of Indian sculptors, architects, engineers, and astronomers

were sent into the mines along with the mass of slaves for the killing task of getting out the ore. The technical ability of these people was of no interest to the colonial economy. They were treated as so many skilled workers." Yet all traces of those broken cultures were not lost: hope of the rebirth of a lost dignity sparked many Indian risings.

In 1781 Tupac Amaru laid siege to Cuzco. This mestizo chief, a direct descendant of the Inca emperors, headed the broadest of messianic revolutionary movements. The rebellion broke out in Tinta province, which had been almost depopulated by enforced service in the Cerro Rico mines. Mounted on his white horse, Tupac Amaru entered the plaza of Tungasuca and announced to the sound of drums and *pututus* that he had condemned the royal Corregidor Antonio Juan de Arriaga to the gallows and put an end to the Potosí *mita.* A few days later Tupac issued a decree liberating the slaves. He abolished all taxes and forced labor in all forms. The Indians rallied by the thousands to the forces of the "father of all the poor and all the wretched and helpless." He moved against Cuzco at the head of his *guerrilleros,* promising them that all who died while under his orders in this war would return to life to enjoy the happiness and wealth the invaders had wrested from them. Victories and defeats followed; in the end, betrayed and captured by one of his own chiefs, Tupac was handed over in chains to the royalists. The Examiner Areche entered his cell to demand, in exchange for promises, the names of his rebel accomplices. Tupac Amaru replied scornfully, "There are no accomplices here other than you and I. You as oppressor, I as liberator, deserve to die." [29]

Tupac was tortured, along with his wife, his children, and his chief aides, in Cuzco's Plaza del Wacaypata. His tongue was cut out; his arms and legs were tied to four horses with the intention of quartering him, but his body would not break; he was finally beheaded at the foot of the gallows. His head was sent to Tinta, one arm to Tungasuca and the other to Carabaya, one leg to Santa Rosa and the other to Livitaca. The torso was burned and the ashes thrown in the Río Watanay. It was proposed that all his descendants be obliterated up to the fourth generation.

In 1802 a chief named Astorpilco, also a descendant of the Incas, was visited by Humboldt in Cajamarca, on the exact spot where his

ancestor Atahualpa had first seen the conquistador Pizarro. The chief's son took the German scholar on a tour of the ruins of the town and the rubble of the old Inca palace, and spoke as they walked of the fabulous treasures hidden beneath the dust and ashes. "Don't you sometimes feel like digging for the treasure to satisfy your needs?" Humboldt asked him. The youth replied: "No, we never feel like doing that. My father says it would be sinful. If we were to find the golden branches and fruits, the white people would hate us and do us harm." [30] The chief himself raised wheat in a small field, but that was not enough to save him from white covetousness. The usurpers, hungry for gold and silver and for slaves to work the mines, never hesitated to seize lands when their crops offered a tempting profit.

The plunder continued down the years and in 1969, when agrarian reform was announced in Peru, reports still appeared in the press of Indians from the broken mountain communities coming with flags unfurled to invade lands that had been robbed from them or their ancestors, and of the army driving them away with bullets. Nearly two centuries had to pass after Tupac Amaru's death before the nationalist general Juan Velasco Alvarado would take up and apply Tupac's resounding, never forgotten words: "Campesino! Your poverty shall no longer feed the master!"

Other heroes whose defeat was reversed by time were the Mexicans Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos. Hidalgo, who till the age of fifty was a peaceable rural priest, pealed the bells of the church of Dolores one fine day to summon the Indians to fight for their freedom: "Will you stir yourselves to the task of recovering from the hated Spaniards the lands robbed from your ancestors three hundred years ago?" He raised the standard of the Indian Virgin of Guadalupe and before six weeks were out eighty thousand men were following him, armed with machetes, pikes, slings, and bows and arrows. The revolutionary priest put an end to tribute and divided up the lands of Guadalajara; he decreed freedom for the slaves and led his forces toward Mexico City. He was finally executed after a military defeat and is said to have left a testament of passionate repentance. The revolution soon found another leader, however, the priest José María Morelos: "You must regard as enemies all the rich, the nobles, and high-ranking officials . . ." His movement—combining In-

dian insurgency and social revolution—came to control a large part of Mexico before he too was defeated and shot. As one U.S. senator wrote, the independence of Mexico, six years later, "turned out to be a typically Hispanic family affair between European and American-born members . . . a political fight within the dominating social class." [31] The *encomienda* serf became a peon and the *encomendero* a hacienda owner.

For the Indians, No Resurrection at the End of Holy Week

Masters of Indian *pongos*—domestic servants—were still offering them for hire in La Paz newspapers at the beginning of our century. Until the revolution of 1952 restored the forgotten right of dignity to Bolivian Indians, the *pongo* slept beside the dog, ate the leftovers of his dinner, and knelt when speaking to anyone with a white skin. Four-legged beasts of burden were scarce in the conquistadores' time and they used Indian backs to transport their baggage; even to this day Aymara and Quechua porters can be seen all over the Andean *altiplano* carrying loads for a crust of bread. Pneumoconiosis was Latin America's first occupational disease, and the lungs of today's Bolivian miner refuse to continue functioning at the age of thirty-five: the implacable silica dust impregnates his skin, cracks his face and hands, destroys his sense of smell and taste, hardens and kills his lungs.

Tourists love to photograph *altiplano* natives in their native costumes, unaware that these were imposed by Charles III at the end of the eighteenth century. The dresses that the Spaniards made Indian females wear were copied from the regional costumes of Estremaduran, Andalusian, and Basque peasant women, and the center-part hair style was imposed by Viceroy Toledo. The same was not true of the consumption of coca, which already existed in Inca times. But coca was then distributed in moderation; the Inca government had a monopoly on it and only permitted its use for ritual purposes or for those who worked in the mines. The Spaniards energetically stimulated its consumption. It was good business. In Potosí in the sixteenth century as much was spent on European clothes for the oppressors as on coca for the oppressed. In Cuzco four hundred Spanish merchants lived off the coca traffic; every year one hundred thousand baskets

with a million kilos of coca-leaf entered the Potosí silver mines. The Church took a tax from the drug. The Inca historian Garcilaso de la Vega tells us in his *Comentarios Reales Que Tratan del Origen de los Incas* that the bishop, canons, and other Cuzco church dignitaries got most of their income from tithes on coca, and that the transport and sale of the product enriched many Spaniards. For the few coins they received for their work the Indians bought coca-leaf instead of food: chewing it, they could—at the price of shortening their lives—better endure the deadly tasks imposed on them. In addition to coca the Indians drank potent *aguardiente*, and their owners complained of the propagation of "maleficent vices." In twentieth-century Potosí the Indians still chew coca to kill hunger and themselves, and still burn their guts with pure alcohol—sterile forms of revenge for the condemned. Bolivian miners still call their wages *mita* as in olden days.

Exiled in their own land, condemned to an eternal exodus, Latin America's native peoples were pushed into the poorest areas—arid mountains, the middle of deserts—as the dominant civilization extended its frontiers. *The Indians have suffered, and continue to suffer, the curse of their own wealth; that is the drama of all Latin America.* When placer gold was discovered in Nicaragua's Río Bluefields, the Carca Indians were quickly expelled far from their riparian lands, and the same happened with the Indians in all the fertile valleys and rich-subsoil lands south of the Rio Grande. The massacres of Indians that began with Columbus never stopped. In Uruguay and Argentine Patagonia they were exterminated during the last century by troops that hunted them down and penned them in forests or in the desert so that they might not disturb the organized advance of cattle latifundia.* The Yaqui Indians of the Mexican state

* The last of the Charruas, who lived by raising bulls in the wild pampas of northern Uruguay, were betrayed in 1832 by President José Fructuoso Rivera. Removed from the bush that gave them protection, deprived of horses and arms by false promises of friendship, they were overwhelmed at a place called Boca del Tigre. "The bugles sounded the attack," wrote Eduardo Acevedo Díaz in *La Época* (August 19, 1890). "The horde churned about desperately, one after the other of its young braves falling like bulls pierced in the neck." Many chiefs were killed. The few Indians who could break through the circle of fire took vengeance soon afterward. Pursued by Rivera's

of Sonora were drowned in blood so that their lands, fertile and rich in minerals, could be sold without any unpleasantness to various U.S. capitalists. Survivors were deported to plantations in Yucatán, and the Yucatán peninsula became not only the cemetery of the Mayas who had been its owners, but also of the Yaquis who came from afar: at the beginning of our century the fifty kings of henequen had over one hundred thousand Indian slaves on their plantations. Despite the exceptional physical endurance of the strapping, handsome Yaquis, two-thirds of them died during the first year of slave labor. In our day henequen can compete with synthetic fiber substitutes only because of the workers' abysmally low standard of living. Things have certainly changed, but not as much—at least for the natives of Yucatán—as some believe: "The living conditions of these workers are much like slave labor," says one contemporary authority.[32] On the Andean slopes near Bogota the Indian peon still must give a day's work without pay to get the *hacendado*'s permission to farm his own plot on moonlit nights. As René Dumont says, "This Indian's ancestors, answering to no man, used once to cultivate the rich soil of the ownerless plain. Now he works for nothing to gain the right to cultivate the poor slopes of the mountain." [33]

Not even Indians isolated in the depths of forests are safe in our day. At the beginning of this century 230 tribes survived in Brazil; since then ninety have disappeared, erased from the planet by firearms and microbes. Violence and disease, the advance guard of civilization: for the Indian, contact with the white man continues to be contact with death. Every legal dispensation since 1537 meant to protect Brazil's Indians has been turned against them. Under every Brazilian constitution they are "the original and natural masters" of

brother, they laid an ambush and riddled him and his soldiers with spears. The chief Sepe "had the tip of his spear adorned with some tendons from the corpse."

In Argentine Patagonia soldiers drew pay for each pair of testicles they brought in. David Viñas' novel *Los dueños de la tierra* (1959) opens with an Indian hunt: "For killing was like raping someone. Something good. And it gave a man pleasure: you had to move fast, you could yell, you sweated and afterward you felt hungry . . . The intervals got longer between shots. Undoubtedly some straddled body remained in one of these coverts—an Indian body on its back with a blackish stain between its thighs . . ."

the land they occupy, but the richer that virgin land proves to be, the greater the threat hanging over their lives. Nature's very generosity makes them targets of plunder and crime. Indian hunting has become ferocious in recent years; the world's greatest forest, a huge tropical zone open to legend and adventure, has inspired a new "American dream." Men and business enterprises from the United States, a new procession of conquistadores, have poured into Amazonia as if it were another Far West. This U.S. invasion has inflamed the avarice of Brazilian adventurers as never before. The Indians die out leaving no trace, and the land is sold for dollars to the new interested parties. Gold and other plentiful minerals, timber and rubber, riches whose commerical value the Indians are not even aware of, recur in the reports of each of the few investigations that have been made. It is known that the Indians have been machine-gunned from helicopters and light airplanes and inoculated with smallpox virus, that dynamite has been tossed into their villages, and that they have been given gifts of sugar mixed with strychnine and salt mixed with arsenic. The director of the Indian Protection Service, named by the Castelo Branco dictatorship to clean up its administration, was himself accused, with proof, of committing forty-two different kinds of crimes against the Indians. That scandal broke in 1968.

Indian society in our time does not exist in a vacuum, outside the general framework of the Latin American economy. There are, it is true, Brazilian tribes still sealed within the jungle, *altiplano* communities totally isolated from the world, redoubts of barbarism on the Venezuelan frontier; but in general the Indians are incorporated into the system of production and the consumer market, even if indirectly. They participate in an economic and social order which assigns them the role of victim—the most exploited of the exploited. They buy and sell a good part of the few things they consume and produce, at the mercy of powerful and voracious intermediaries who charge much and pay little; they are day laborers on plantations, the cheapest work force, and soldiers in the mountains; they spend their days toiling for the world market or fighting for their conquerors. In countries like Guatemala, for example, they are at the center of national economic life: in a continuous annual cycle they leave their "sacred lands"—high lands where each small farm is the size of a

corpse—to contribute two hundred thousand pairs of hands to the harvesting of coffee, cotton, and sugar in the lowlands. They are transported in trucks like cattle, and it is not always need, but sometimes liquor, that makes them decide to go. The contractors provide a marimba band and plenty of *aguardiente* and when the Indian sobers up he is already in debt. He will pay it off laboring on hot and strange lands which—perhaps with a few centavos in his pocket, perhaps with tuberculosis or malaria—he will leave after a few months. The army collaborates efficiently in the task of convincing the reluctant. Expropriation of the Indians—usurpation of their lands and their labor—has gone hand in hand with racist attitudes which are in turn fed by the objective degradation of civilizations broken by the Conquest. The effects of the Conquest and the long ensuing period of humiliation left the cultural and social identity the Indians had achieved in fragments. Yet in Guatemala this pulverized identity is the only one that persists.* It persists in tragedy. During Holy Week, processions of the heirs of the Mayas produce frightful exhibitions of collective masochism. They drag heavy crosses and participate in the flagellation of Jesus step by step along the interminable ascent to Golgotha; with howls of pain they turn His death and His burial into the cult of their own death and their own burial, the annihilation of the beautiful life of long ago. Only there is no Resurrection at the end of their Holy Week.

Ouro Prêto, the Potosí of Gold

The gold fever which is still sentencing Amazonian Indians to death or slavery is no novelty in Brazil. For two centuries after Brazil's discovery, the soil stubbornly denied metal to its Portuguese proprietors. In the first period of coastal colonization timber, or brazilwood, was commercially exploited; then sugar plantations were

* The Maya-Quichés believed in a single god; practiced fasting, penitence, abstinence, and confession; and believed in the flood at the end of the world. Christianity thus brought them few novelties. Religious disintegration began with colonization. The Catholic religion assimilated a few magical and totemic aspects of the Maya religion in a vain attempt to submit the Indian faith to the conquistadores' ideology. The crushing of the original culture opened the way for syncretism.[34]

started in the Northeast. In contrast to Spanish Latin America, there seemed to be no gold or silver. Having found no highly developed and organized civilizations, only savage and scattered tribes who had no knowledge of metal, the Portuguese had to discover the gold on their own as they opened up the territory and exterminated its inhabitants.

The *bandeirantes** of the São Paulo region had crossed the great expanse between the Serra da Mantiqueira and the Rio São Francisco headwaters, and had observed small traces of alluvial gold in the beds and banks of several streams. The millennial action of the rains had eaten into the seams in the rocks and deposited gold in river beds, valleys, and mountain ravines. Beneath the layers of sand, dirt, or clay, the stony subsoil revealed nuggets that were easily removed from the quartz *cascalho*, or gravel; methods of extraction became more complex as the more superficial deposits were exhausted. Thus the Minas Gerais region entered history with a rush: the largest amount of gold ever discovered in the world till then was extracted in the shortest space of time.

"Here the gold was a forest," says the beggar one meets today, his eyes scanning the church towers. "There was gold on the sidewalks, it grew like grass." He is seventy-five years old now and considers himself part of the folklore in Mariana, the mining town where, as in nearby Ouro Prêto, the clock has simply stopped. "Death is certain, the hour uncertain—everyone has his time marked in the book," the beggar tells me. He spits on the stone steps and shakes his head: "They had more money than they could count," he says, as if he had seen them. "They didn't know where to put it, so they built churches one next to the other."

Once this was the most important region of Brazil. Now . . . "Well, there's no life at all," says the old man. "No young folk. They all go." His bare feet move slowly beside me under the warm afternoon sun. "See that? On the front of that church, the sun and moon.

* A *bandeirante* was a member of a *bandeira*, a band of Portuguese slave- or gold-hunters in the Brazilian interior. The São Paulo *bandeiras* were part of a paramilitary organization whose strength varied. Their expeditions into the jungle played an important role in the interior colonization of Brazil. (Trans.)

That means that the slaves worked day and night. This church was built by black men; that one by white men. And that's the house of Monsenhor Alipio who died right on his ninety-ninth birthday."

In the eighteenth century Brazilian production of the coveted metal exceeded the total volume of gold that Spain had taken from its colonies in two previous centuries. Adventurers and fortune hunters poured in. Brazil had three hundred thousand inhabitants in 1700; a century later, at the end of the gold years, the population had multiplied eleven times. No less than three hundred thousand Portuguese emigrated to Brazil in the eighteenth century, a larger contingent than Spain contributed to all its Latin American colonies. From the conquest of Brazil until abolition, it is estimated that some ten million blacks were brought from Africa; there are no precise figures for the eighteenth century, but the gold cycle absorbed slave labor in prodigious quantities.

Salvador de Bahia was the Brazilian capital of the prosperous Northeastern sugar cycle, but the "golden age" in Minas Gerais moved the country's economic and political capital southward and Rio de Janeiro, the region's port, became the new capital in 1763. In the dynamic heart of the new mining economy, camps bloomed abruptly into cities, described by a contemporary colonial authority as "sanctuaries for criminals, vagabonds, and malefactors," in a vertigo of easy riches. The "Vila Rica de Ouro Prêto" * had grown to city size by 1711; born of the miners' avalanche, it was the quintessence of the gold civilization. Simão Ferreira Machado, describing it twenty-three years later, said that the power of Ouro Prêto businessmen surpassed by far that of Lisbon's most flourishing merchants: "Hither, as to a port, are directed and collected in the Royal Mint the grandiose amounts of gold from all the Mines. Here dwell the best educated men, both lay and ecclesiastic. Here is the seat of all the nobility and the strength of the military. It is, by virtue of its natural position, the head of the whole of America; and by the wealth of its riches, it is the precious pearl of Brazil." [35] Another writer of the period, Francisco Tavares de Brito, in 1732 defined Ouro Prêto as "the Potosí of gold."

* The "Rich Town of Black Gold," so called because the mined gold turned black on exposure to the humid air, due to the presence of silver. (Trans.)

Frequent complaints and protests reached Lisbon about the sinful life in Ouro Prêto, Sabará, São João d'El Rei, Mariana, and the whole turbulent mining district. Fortunes were made and lost overnight. It was commonplace for a miner to pay a fortune for a black who played a good trumpet and twice as much for a mulatto prostitute, "to abandon himself with her to continuous and scandalous sins." Men of the cloth behaved no better: official correspondence of the time contains many complaints against "bad clergymen" infesting the area. They were accused of using their immunity to smuggle gold inside little wooden images of saints. It was said that in 1705 Minas Gerais did not contain one priest who was interested in the Christian faith of the people, and six years later the Crown banned the establishment of any religious order in the mining district.

In any case, there was a proliferation of handsome churches built and decorated in the baroque style characteristic of the region. Minas Gerais attracted the best artisans of the time. Outwardly the churches looked sober and austere, but the interiors, symbolizing the divine soul, glistened with pure gold on their altars, reredoses, pillars, and bas-relief panels. Precious metals were not spared, so that the churches could achieve "the riches of Heaven," as the monk Miguel de São Francisco recommended in 1710. The price of religious services was astronomical, but everything in the mining area was exorbitant. As had happened in Potosí, Ouro Prêto devoted itself to squandering its sudden wealth. Processions and spectacles provided occasions to exhibit splendid robes and adornments. A religious festival in 1733 lasted over a week. There were not only processions on foot, on horseback, and in triumphal mother-of-pearl, silk, and gold chariots, with fantastic costumes and dazzling settings, but there were equestrian tournaments, bullfights, and dancing in the streets to the sound of flutes, flageolets, and guitars.

The slaves spent their strength and their days in the gold-washing installations. "There they work," wrote Luís Gomes Ferreira, a doctor who lived in Minas Gerais during the first half of the eighteenth century, "there they eat, and often there they have to sleep; and since when they work they are bathed in sweat, with their feet always in the cold earth, on stones, or in water, when they rest or eat their pores close and they become so chilled that they are susceptible

to many dangerous illnesses, such as very severe pleurisies, apoplectic and paralytic fits, convulsions, pneumonia, and many other diseases." [36] The *capitães do mato* of Minas Gerais collected rewards in gold for the severed heads of slaves who tried to escape. Disease was a blessing from heaven because it meant the approach of death.

The slaves were called the "coins of the Indies" when they were measured, weighed, and embarked in Luanda in the Portuguese colony of Angola; in Brazil those surviving the ocean voyage became "the hands and feet" of the white master. Angola exported Bantu slaves and elephant tusks in exchange for clothing, liquor, and firearms, but Ouro Prêto miners preferred blacks shipped from the little beach of Ouidah on the Gulf of Guinea because they were more vigorous, lasted somewhat longer, and had the magic power to find gold. Every miner also needed a black mistress from Ouidah to bring him luck on his expeditions.[37] * Ouro Prêto's appetite for slaves became insatiable; they expired in short order, only in rare cases enduring the seven years of continuous labor. Yet the Portuguese were meticulous in baptizing them all before they crossed the Atlantic, and once in Brazil they were obliged to attend mass, although they were not allowed to sit in the pews or to enter the chancel.

The gold explosion not only increased the importation of slaves, but absorbed a good part of the black labor from the sugar and tobacco plantations elsewhere in Brazil, leaving them without hands. The miners were contemptuous of farming, and in 1700 and 1713, in the full flush of prosperity, hunger stalked the region: millionaires had to eat cats, dogs, rats, ants, and birds of prey. A royal decree in 1711 banned the sale of slaves occupied in agriculture, with the exception of those who showed "perversity of character."

By the middle of the eighteenth century many miners had gone to look for diamonds in Serra do Frio. The crystalline stones the gold hunters had tossed aside while exploring the riverbeds had turned out to be diamonds; Minas Gerais had both diamonds and gold in

* In Cuba, medicinal powers were attributed to female slaves. According to one-time slave Esteban Montejo, "There was one type of sickness the whites picked up, a sickness of the veins and male organs. It could only be got rid of with black women; if the man who had it slept with a Negress he was cured immediately." [38]

equal quantities. The booming camp of Tijuco became the center of the diamond district and there, as in Ouro Prêto, the wealthy sported the latest European fashions, bringing luxurious clothes, weapons, and furniture from across the ocean for their hour of delirium and dissipation. A mulatto slave, Francisca da Silva, or Xica da Silva, won her freedom by entering the bed of millionaire João Fernandes de Oliveira, the uncrowned king of Tijuco; she was ugly and had two children, but became "the *xica* who gives orders." [39] As she had never seen the sea and wanted it near her, her *cavalheiro* made her a large artificial lake on which he floated a ship, complete with crew. In the São Francisco foothills he built her a castle with a garden of exotic plants and artificial waterfalls; in her honor he gave sumptuous banquets with the finest wines, balls that never ended, and theater and concert performances.

In 1818 Tijuco could still manage a large-scale celebration of the prince of Portugal, but ten years earlier the Englishman John Mawe had visited Ouro Prêto and had been startled by its poverty. He found empty and worthless houses with futile "for sale" signs, and ate wretched and meager food. Tijuco did not take long to meet the same fate. The crisis had at first led to rebellion. José Joaquim da Silva Xavier, known as "Tiradentes"—the "toothpuller"—was hanged and quartered after being tortured, and other fighters for independence had disappeared from Ouro Prêto into jail or exile.

What Brazilian Gold Contributed to Progress in England

The gold began to flow just when Portugal signed the Methuen Treaty with England in 1703. The treaty crowned a long series of privileges obtained by British merchants in Portugal. In return for some advantages for its wines in the English market, Portugal opened its own and its colonies' markets to British manufactures. In view of the existing inequality of industrial development, this proved disastrous for local Portuguese manufactures. It was not with wine that English textiles were paid for, but with gold—Brazilian gold—and in the process Portuguese looms were paralyzed. Not content with killing its own industry in the bud, Portugal destroyed the seeds of any kind of manufacturing development in Brazil: until 1715 sugar refin-

eries were banned, in 1729 it was made a criminal offense to open new roads in the mining region, and in 1785 local looms and spinning mills were ordered burned.

England and Holland, the leading gold and slave contrabandists, amassed fortunes in the illegal "black meat" traffic and are said to have illicitly garnered more than half the metal the Portuguese Crown was supposed to get from Brazil in *quinto real* tax. But Brazilian gold was channeled to London by licit as well as illicit methods. The gold boom, which brought a host of Portuguese to Minas Gerais, sharply stimulated colonial demand for industrial products and at the same time provided the means to pay for them. Just as Potosí silver rebounded off Spanish soil, Minas Gerais gold only reached Portugal in transit. The metropolis became an intermediary. In 1755 the Marquis de Pombal, Portugal's prime minister, tried to revive a protectionist policy, but it was too late. He declared that the English had conquered Portugal without the trouble of a conquest, that they were supplying two-thirds of its needs, and that British agents controlled the whole of Portuguese trade. Portugal was producing almost nothing, and the wealth brought by gold was so illusory that even the black slaves who mined it were clothed by the British.

Celso Furtado has noted that Britain, following a farsighted policy with respect to industrial development, used Brazilian gold to pay for essential imports from other countries and could thus concentrate on investments in the manufacturing sector. Thanks to this historical graciousness on the part of the Portuguese, Britain could apply rapid and efficient technical innovations. Europe's financial center moved from Amsterdam to London. According to British sources, the value of Brazilian gold arriving in London reached £50,000 a week in some periods. Without this tremendous accumulation of gold reserves, Britain would not have been able, later on, to confront Napoleon.

No result of the dynamic stimulus of gold remained on Brazilian soil except churches and works of art. By the end of the eighteenth century, although the diamond supply was still not exhausted, the country was prostrate. Furtado calculates that at that time—the low point of the whole colonial period—the per capita income of the three-million-odd Brazilians did not exceed $50 a year in today's buying power. Minas Gerais drowned in a long wave of decadence

and insolvency. Incredibly, a modern Brazilian author expresses gratitude for the favor and submits that the capital the English derived from Minas Gerais "aided the great banking network that built international trade and made it possible to raise the living standards of peoples capable of progress." ° Inexorably condemned to poverty so that foreigners might progress, the "incapable" mining communities moldered in isolation and could only resign themselves to scraping a livelihood from lands already despoiled of metals and precious stones. Subsistence farming replaced mining. Today the Minas Gerais countryside, like the Northeast, is the kingdom of the latifundio and the "hacienda colonels," a dauntless bastion of backwardness. The sale of Minas Gerais workers to haciendas in other states is almost as common as the slave traffic in the Northeast. Recently, Franklin de Oliveira toured Minas Gerais. He found collapsing wooden huts, villages without water or light, prostitutes of an average age of thirteen on the road in the valley of the Jequitinhonha, and crazed and famished people along the roadsides.[41] Minas Gerais was once accurately described as having a heart of gold in a breast of iron, but its fabulous "iron quadrilateral" is being exploited today by a joint Hanna Mining Company–Bethlehem Steel enterprise: the deposits were surrendered in a sinister deal in 1964. The iron, in foreigners' hands, will leave no more behind than did the gold.

Only the explosion of artistic talent remains as a memento of the gold delirium, apart from the holes in the ground and the abandoned cities; nor could Portugal salvage anything creative except for the aesthetic revolution. The convent of Mafra, pride of Dom João V, lifted Portugal from artistic decadence: in its carillons of thirty-seven bells and in its solid gold vessels and candelabra, there still glints the gold of Minas Gerais. The Minas churches have been extensively plundered and few sacred objects of portable size remain in them, but monumental baroque works still rise above the colonial ruins—façades and pulpits, galleries, reredoses, human figures designed, carved, or sculpted by Antônio Francisco Lisboa—"Aleijadinho"—

° The author, Augusto de Lima Jr., derives great happiness from "the expansion of colonizing imperialism which ignorant people today, inspired by their Moscow masters, describe as a crime." [40]

"Little Cripple," genius son of a female slave and a famous artisan. The eighteenth century was coming to a close when "Aleijadinho" began carving in stone a group of large sacred figures in the garden of the Bom Jesus do Matosinhos church in Congonhas do Campo. The work was called "The Prophets," but there was no longer any glory in prophesying. The gold euphoria was a thing of the past; all the pomp and gaiety had vanished and there was no room for hope. This dramatic final testimony, like a grand monument to the fleeting gold civilization that was born to die, was left to succeeding generations by the most talented artist in all Brazil's history. "Aleijadinho," disfigured and crippled by leprosy, created his masterpiece with chisel and hammer tied to fingerless hands, dragging himself on his knees to his workshop every morning.

Legend insists that in the Nossa Senhora das Mercês e Misericordia church in Minas Gerais, dead miners still celebrate mass on cold rainy nights. When the priest turns around, raising his arms from the high altar, one sees the bones of his face.

2. King Sugar and Other Agricultural Monarchs

Plantations, Latifundia, and Fate

Undoubtedly gold and silver were the main motivating force in the Conquest, but Columbus on his second voyage brought the first sugarcane roots from the Canary Islands and planted them in what is now the Dominican Republic. To the Admiral's joy they took hold rapidly. Grown and refined on a small scale in Sicily, Madeira, and the Cape Verde Islands, and purchased in the Orient at high prices, sugar was so precious to Europeans that it figured in the dowries of queens. It was sold in pharmacies, weighed out by the gram. For almost three centuries after the discovery of America no agricultural product had more importance for European commerce than American sugar. Canefields were planted in the warm, damp littoral of Northeast Brazil; then in the Caribbean islands—Barbados, Jamaica, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Guadeloupe, Cuba, Puerto Rico—and in Veracruz and the Peruvian coast, which proved to be ideal terrain for the "white gold." Legions of slaves came from Africa to provide King Sugar with the prodigal, wageless labor force he required: human fuel for the burning. The land was devastated by this selfish plant which invaded the New World, felling forests, squandering natural fertility, and destroying accumulated soil humus. The long sugar cycle generated a prosperity as mortal as the prosperity generated by the silver and gold of Potosí, Ouro Prêto, Zacatecas, and Guanajuato.