SPANIARDS IN THE COLONIAL EMPIRE
CREOLES VS. PENINSULARS?
MARK A. BURKHOLDER
Spaniards in the Colonial Empire
**Viewpoints/Puntos de Vista**  
Themes and Interpretations in Latin American History

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Spaniards in the Colonial Empire
Creoles vs. Peninsulars?

Mark A. Burkholder
For

Sue Burkholder, D. S. Chandler, and James S. Saeger
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Series Editor’s Preface

Each book in the Viewpoints/Puntos de Vista series introduces students to a significant theme or topic in Latin American history. In an age in which student and faculty interest in the Global South increasingly challenges the old focus on the history of Europe and North America, Latin American history has assumed an increasingly prominent position in undergraduate curricula.

Some of these books discuss the ways in which historians have interpreted these themes and topics, thus demonstrating that our understanding of our past is constantly changing, through the emergence of new sources, methodologies, and historical theories. Others offer an introduction to a particular theme by means of a case study or biography in a manner easily understood by the contemporary, nonspecialist reader. Yet others give an overview of a major theme that might serve as the foundation of an upper-level course.

What is common to all of these books is their goal of historical synthesis. They draw on the insights of generations of scholarship on the most enduring and fascinating issues in Latin American history, and through the use of primary sources as appropriate. Each book is written by a specialist in Latin American history who is concerned with undergraduate teaching, yet has also made his or her mark as a first-rate scholar.

The books in this series can be used in a variety of ways, recognizing the differences in teaching conditions at small liberal arts colleges, large public universities, and research-oriented institutions with doctoral programs. Faculty have particular needs depending on whether they teach large lectures with discussion sections, small lecture or discussion-oriented classes, or large lectures with no discussion sections, and whether they teach on a semester or trimester system. The format adopted for this series fits all of these different parameters.
In this sixth volume in the Viewpoints/Puntos de Vista series, Professor Mark Burkholder analyzes Spanish colonialism in the Americas from the vantage point of the “Spaniards” themselves, a group that included peninsulars, recent arrivals born in Spain, and creoles, people born of Spanish descent in the New World. *Spaniards in the Colonial Empire: Creoles vs. Peninsulars?* discusses the relationship between these groups, and particularly the growing conflict over the Crown’s favoring of peninsulars for political office, which helped predicate the devastating Wars of Independence and, ultimately, the emergence of Latin American nations in the 1820s.

Burkholder skillfully disaggregates the terms “creole” and “peninsular,” both of which included a wide variety of individuals from different social strata. He also examines the many similarities between the groups, including shared social, legal, and economic privileges that placed them atop colonial society. He pays close attention to intermarriages and other forms of union and cooperation between peninsulars and creoles, concluding that open conflict was rare before the Spanish empire in the Americas entered its decline following Napoleon’s invasion of Spain in 1807. Ambitious in scope yet concise and accessible to undergraduate students, this is the only current work that brings the Spaniards in their vast colonial empire to life.

Jurgen Buchenau
University of North Carolina, Charlotte
Preface

This short book for undergraduates focuses on a large topic – creoles (Spaniards born in the “Indies,” as they termed the New World), and their relationships, rivalries, and ultimately open conflict with peninsulars (Spaniards born in Spain). It pays particular attention to “native sons” and “native daughters,” terms used as synonyms for “creoles” within the region of their birth, two issues, and an offensive attitude. The first issue is the rewards that native sons and daughters and other creole descendants of conquistadors and early settlers claimed they should receive in recognition of their ancestors’ service to the Crown. The second issue concerns appointments to ecclesiastical and royal offices that native sons believed were legally theirs by virtue of their birthplace. The offensive attitude is the smug superiority that numerous peninsulars displayed in their relations with the rest of society, including native sons and daughters and other creoles, by reason of their birth in Spain and claims of unsullied Spanish ancestry. Portuguese born in Brazil similarly objected to immigrants from Portugal because of their arrogant attitude.

Spaniards in the Indies were either immigrants or born there. While place of birth affected their view of themselves and each other as well as their position in colonial society, all Spaniards in America enjoyed benefits denied to indigenous peoples and others of non-Spanish descent. This was also true in Brazil where Portuguese distinguished between compatriots from Iberia or reinois and native sons known as mazombos or brasileiros. Besides being peninsulars or creoles, Spaniards had other identities: all were natives of (natural de) a specific municipality and a larger administrative region. For example, creoles born in Arequipa, Peru, were native sons and daughters of that city as well as the region under the jurisdiction of the high court or Audiencia of Lima. Regions became their homelands or patrias; municipalities were their hometowns or
The collective term “creoles” is useful when applied broadly to Spaniards born in different jurisdictions. Whenever possible, however, this book employs “native sons” and “native daughters” and distinguishes them from “other creoles” born in different administrative and ecclesiastical units. The Crown made the same distinction. Importantly, it drew upon early Castilian legislation to justify a general policy of excluding native sons from royal offices with judicial responsibilities in their home jurisdiction because of family and economic ties. Native sons and daughters, of course, were not homogeneous. Disputes arose among them as well as with other groups in society. Differences in social “quality” (calidad), occupation and financial status also divided them from other creoles and peninsulars regardless of location or birthplace.

Conflict among Spaniards contesting the rewards of conquest in the New World pitted “old hands” – the first conquistadors and settlers – against later arrivals from Spain – the “newcomers” or “greenhorns.” Antagonism also emerged between native sons, including the legitimate American-born descendants of old hands, and outsiders, whether peninsulars or creoles living away from their homelands. Repeatedly, native sons focused attention on institutions in which they faced discrimination. Initially this included admission to religious orders; subsequently it expanded to elective positions within these orders’ provinces or territorial units. The Crown’s appointment of peninsulars to ecclesiastical and royal offices to which native sons asserted a legal right provoked repeated and outspoken protest.

Despite internal rivalries, all whites in the Indies shared identifiable cultural characteristics. Originally they referred to themselves as “Christians” and “Spaniards” regardless of place of birth. Most arrived in the Indies speaking Castilian Spanish. They shared a belief in Christianity and allegiance to a single monarch; emphasized honor and marital, family, local, and regional bonds; pursued economic interests; and displayed an attitude of superiority toward the rest of society. These commonalities helped to unite them regardless of place of birth.

By the early 1560s, the word criollo or “creole” designated a Spaniard born in the Indies. Criollo is derived from the Portuguese crioulo, a word that imported Africans (bozales) used to refer derogatorily to American-born descendants of earlier slaves. This connection to slavery gave “creole” a pejorative connotation, although by the late seventeenth century, some native sons proudly adopted it. Other synonyms for creole
included \textit{indiano}, \textit{hijo de la tierra}, \textit{benemérito} and, especially in the eighteenth century, \textit{español americano} (American Spaniard) or simply \textit{americano} (American). From the seventeenth century onward, \textit{gachupín} (one who wear spurs) in New Spain and \textit{chapetón} (tenderfoot or greenhorn) elsewhere became widespread although somewhat deprecating terms for recently arrived Spanish immigrants in particular. “Peninsular” as a synonym for a person born in Spain entered frequent usage in the early nineteenth century as an outgrowth of the “Peninsular War,” as the British dubbed the conflict fought against Napoleon’s armies in Iberia from 1808 to 1814. Because of its convenience, historians continue to apply the term when identifying Spaniards born in Spain. Far from their birthplace, these immigrants quickly realized that their identity had to encompass more than the village, town, or even city and bishopric from which they came. Thus, they identified themselves by their “nation” or region in Spain, for example, as Andalusians, Extremadurans, Basques (conflating the Basque Provinces of Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, and Alava, plus sometimes Navarre), and \textit{Montañeses} (as persons from the mountains of Burgos north into Cantabria or Santander were known). At times, language separated the immigrants. The majority shared the Castilian dialect, but Basques, Galicians, and Catalans often had to learn that language in America.

Creoles frequently asserted that recent immigrants only sought to get rich quickly and return wealthy to Spain, but probably less than 10% ever did so. Most found work in the Indies, established a residence, and embedded themselves in their new locale. This book uses “radicados” as a collective term for “rooted” Spaniards or Portuguese who settled outside of their homeland (\textit{patria}) and often married in their new place of residence; developed local economic, family, and political interests; and became heads of citizen households (\textit{vecinos}) in their new municipality.¹

Contemporaries writing about the wars of independence in the early nineteenth century emphasized the importance of peninsular discrimination against creoles and claimed superiority over them as a cause of the conflicts. Independence itself brought the expulsion or execution of peninsulars either during the conflict or soon afterward in every former mainland colony. Native sons and other political and military leaders repeatedly made their Old World rivals scapegoats as well as a source of funds. The Liberator Simón Bolívar’s infamous proclamation of “war to the death” was the most extreme example of anti-peninsular policy. But patriots also hurled phrases like “300 years of servitude” as
political slogans and to draw attention to creoles’ claim during and immediately after the wars of sharing centuries of oppression with the indigenous population.

But how widespread was discrimination against creoles? How deep was their antipathy toward peninsulars? It is impossible to know for certain, but after the age of conquest, a relatively small number of immigrants arrived with enviable positions or achieved remarkable financial success. In contrast, examples of poor whites – of both genders and regardless of place of birth – abound.

Enviable peninsulars were those who gained wealth and honors. They included very successful wholesale merchants and a much smaller number of miners; high-ranking officeholders and clerics; and retainers who accompanied viceroys and bishops to their posts, especially in the Habsburg centuries, and received benefits as a result. Aside from clerics, many of these immigrants married native daughters who thus created ties that rooted their husbands in their district of residence and distinguished them from unmarried Spaniards. These radicados were probably as likely to take a “native son” position, or one of several positions, on most issues of the day as were local creoles.

This book is one of the few scholarly efforts to examine the relationship between creoles in general and native sons and daughters in particular with peninsulars from the sixteenth century through independence. It goes beyond claimed discrimination to pay special attention to the extent to which native sons and other creoles actually secured offices. Among its points are the following: (i) all persons recognized as Spaniards in the Indies, regardless of gender or place of birth, enjoyed privileges that set them apart from the rest of the population; (ii) the native son heirs of conquistadors and early settlers could document royal promises of preference for certain appointments; (iii) conflicts between peninsulars and creoles were most vehement in the male religious orders, but occurred in the nunneries as well; (iv) American-born lawyers, especially those educated in Lima, both advocated for native son and other creole preference and were among the beneficiaries of royal patronage; (v) recently arrived peninsulars ignited more opposition than those of longer residence; (vi) cooperation, mutual interest, and native daughter incorporation of peninsulars into local elites through marriage characterized most creole–peninsular relations at the apex of local society throughout the empire; (vii) despite repeated allegations to the contrary, the number of elite creoles genuinely hostile toward peninsulars was rarely large prior to
1808–1810, but increased over the next 10–15 years; and (viii) during the wars of independence and formation of independent states, leaders spawned an unprecedented level of opposition to peninsulars that resulted in confiscation of their property, expulsion, and sometimes death.

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the work of other historians. While its format and student audience preclude a lengthy multi-language bibliography, I want to single out the contributions of the following scholars: Lucrecia Raquel Enríquez Agrazar; Javier Barrientos Grandon, Michel Bertrand, Paulino Castañeda Delgado, Jorge Comadrán Ruiz, Paul Ganster, Bernard Lavallé, Guillermo Lohmann Villena, Juan Marchena Fernández, Oscar Mazín Gómez, Angel Sanz Tapia, Ernst Schäfer, John Frederick Schwallier, Stuart B. Schwartz, Renan Silva, and Susan M. Socolow. Their publications, materials that D. S. Chandler and I gathered long ago, and subsequent information I have collected provide the core of the book’s discussion of royal officials and clerics.

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Mark A. Burkholder
St. Louis, Missouri
Map 1  Bishoprics in the Americas, 1620.
Map 2  *Audiencia* Capitals, 1750.
On the eve of Europeans’ first sustained contact with the Americas, Castile was the largest, most prosperous, and most populous kingdom of the Iberian Peninsula. Victory over the Muslims in Granada in 1492 confirmed Castilians’ belief that they enjoyed their God’s favor. Simultaneously it demonstrated that military success led grateful monarchs to reward service on their behalf by enriching aristocrats, elevating commoners into the nobility, and providing poor soldiers with land.

Conquistadors, settlers, officials, merchants, clerics, and a growing stream of Spanish women followed Columbus and other explorers, founded municipalities, expanded royal dominion, and sought corresponding recompense. As settlement followed conquest, the immigrants replicated insofar as possible the social organization they had left behind, with the important difference that many assumed more elevated social status. Their leaders awarded the most fortunate grants of native labor and tribute (encomiendas). These encomenderos became a new but insecure nobility, for the Crown initially recognized the grants for only one lifetime rather than making them hereditary. Thus, it denied recipients a key attribute in the perpetuation of aristocratic families in Spain while making them dependent on royal favor. Charles I (1516–1556) introduced royal officials to oversee the tribute and labor that reverted to the Crown as the original recipients died. At the same time, he indicated that he would name unrewarded conquistadors and their heirs to these new positions. The installation of government offices, the erection of bishoprics, an increase in missionaries, and the foundation of nunneries.
accompanied the continued arrival of peninsular immigrants and the growing number of their predecessors’ native son and other creole descendants. By 1580, the institutions of Church and state as well as a transatlantic trading system were in place, and rising silver production was enriching the treasury of Philip II. By this date as well, descendants of the conquistadors and early settlers recognized that the prosperity based on encomiendas had largely disappeared and their pursuit of positions in the Church and state intensified.

Spain on the Eve of Empire

Marked by mountains, few navigable rivers, and an extensive coastline, the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 contained five kingdoms. Castile, Aragon, Granada, and Navarre would later comprise the country known as Spain; Portugal was joined to the Crown of Castile from 1580 to 1640. Conquered by Muslim invaders that first arrived from North Africa in 711, Iberia was the site of intermittent warfare for centuries as Christians emerged from modest mountain bases in the north and commenced what became known as the Reconquest. Toledo fell to the Christians in 1085 and in the thirteenth century Ferdinand III of Castile and León conquered Córdoba, Murcia, Seville, and Cádiz. The advance southward brought booty, land, and upward social mobility, especially for mounted warriors. As a legendary hero in a thirteenth-century epic declared, “I gain more in war than I do in peace, for the poor knight lives better in times of war than in times of peace.”1 By the mid-eleventh century, the expanding nobility sought to limit this status to their children, but intermittent warfare on the moving frontier impelled monarchs to reward the military contributions of particularly valorous commoners with ennoblement.

As the frontier advanced, the Crown encouraged repopulation through the creation of chartered Christian municipalities and land grants. Settlers in new and refounded towns received urban and rural plots and access to the community’s land. Nobles gained and later expanded large estates, as did the military orders of Alcántara, Calatrava, and Santiago. The fall in 1492 of Granada, the last independent Muslim kingdom, reinforced the booty mentality of the Reconquest and reaffirmed commoners’ awareness that conquest on behalf of the Castilian Crown could yield noble rank among other rewards. Some 35,000–40,000 Christian