

Historical Background: Latin America and Spain in the 18th Century

1665: the last of Habsburgs, Charles II, took the throne

early 1680s: total administrative, economic collapse of Spain

1700: Charles II died, left no heirs

1700-1713: War of Spanish Succession, international contest to find an heir

1713: Treaty of Utrecht confirmed Philip V (Philip of Anjou, first Bourbon king) as king of Spain BUT following concessions were made:

→ he renounced all rights to French throne

→ *England* gained Gibraltar and Minorca in Mediterranean, the *asiento* (exclusive right to sell slaves to Sp. Indies), and right to send an annual shipload of goods to America

→ *Austria* gained the Spanish Netherlands and Spain's Italian possessions

→ *Portugal* retained Colonia do Sacramento (smuggling center on east bank of River Plate)

Bourbon policy in Spain included:

- greater regalism, absolutism
- attempts to weaken Church power
- installation of more centralized government
- exclusion of landed aristocracy from royal administration
- abolishment of traditional rights of Aragon
- establishment of first standing army
- strengthening of navy through program of shipbuilding

Bourbon policy in America included:

first half of eighteenth century: very little changed; the most important development was economic expansion in the colonies, which set the stage for the Bourbon Crown's deliberate attempts to better exploit them in the second half of the century

second half of 18th century: changes in Spanish policy in the Americas really began to occur during the reign of Charles III (1759-88), especially after England's successful occupation of Havana in 1762-3 (i.e. **Seven Years' War**)

- creation of colonial armies
- concerted attempts to weaken creole control of local government
- creation of **intendant system**: given greater power than traditional local administrators and were almost all peninsulars
- 1739:** creation of viceroyalty of New Granada
- 1767:** expulsion of Jesuits, attempts to confiscate other Church lands
- 1776:** creation of viceroyalty of La Plata
- 1778:** *flota* system abolished, new system of *comercio libre* established

Other important developments in America

- population grew throughout 18th century, but esp. in second half, mostly through natural increase, although also through limited immigration from Spain and arrival of African slaves
- growth, economic development of the periphery in Spanish America
- increased exploitation of Indian labor, particularly in mining regions

Last years of the 18th Century

- the reforms put in place by Charles III remained in place until about 1792; they began to have some of the intended effects in Spain only starting in the early 1780s
- 1792:** renewed warfare between Spain and other European powers led to a more brutal policy of open exploitation of colonies
- output from silver mines decreased significantly during this time
- 1797:** Britain, engaged in war with Spain, imposed a total blockade on Cadiz, in Spain, and also on Spanish American ports; this led Spain to reluctantly allow trade with other, "neutral" countries
- 1797-1801:** the end of Spanish monopoly and establishment of booming trade between Spanish America and U.S.

Castas paintings Discussion questions:

1. What do you notice about the relationships between different family members?
2. What is the family setting like? What activities is the family involved in? How are they dressed?
2. Do you notice any elements of "local color"?
3. What other observations can you make? What kind of insight do these paintings give us into colonial society?