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ECONOMY, SOCIETY, AND POLITICS
UNDER BOURBON RULE

ANTHONY MCFARLANE



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Introduction

This is a history of Colombia during the last century of Spanish rule, when the territory of the modern republic of Colombia stood at the heart of the Spanish Viceroyalty of New Granada. Based largely on research in Spanish and Colombian archives, it is primarily designed as a contribution to the historiography of Spanish America during the period of Bourbon rule between 1700 and 1810. However, as there is no general history of Colombia during this period, the present study also aims at a synthesis, combining the results of archival research with the evidence and interpretations found in the specialized works of other historians of colonial Colombia.

The choice of region and period covered by this study are easily explained. Apart from its intrinsic interest, Colombia, or New Granada as it was called during the period of Spanish rule, is a region that deserves more attention from historians of Spanish America. For, although it was a colony of second rank that did not compare in size or wealth to the viceroyalties of Peru and New Spain, New Granada was independent of the great colonial economic systems that focused around silver mining in the older viceroyalties, and stands as a separate and distinctive territory with a character of its own. From the sixteenth century, the country had its own mining sector, its own connection to the system of Spanish Atlantic trade, and an increasingly distinctive society in which the Indian population was largely replaced by people of mixed race. During the eighteenth century, New Granada also became the core of the first new viceroyalty created since the sixteenth century, and saw one of the greatest popular rebellions of the late colonial period. Then, during the early nineteenth century, it became a major theater for political experimentation and conflict following the break with Spain in 1810, and, after 1819, provided Bolívar with a base for launching wars of liberation against the remaining bastions of royalist control in the continent.

The period covered here, between 1700 and 1810, is of special interest, since it encompasses a distinctive phase in the history of Spain and its empire, delimited by two major political conjunctures. Opening with the crisis triggered by the accession of the Bourbon dynasty to the Spanish

throne in 1700, and closing with another crisis caused by its collapse in 1810, this was a period when the Bourbon monarchy sought to rebuild Spain's control over its empire, both politically and economically. Indeed, it is said that resurgent Spanish imperialism became so forceful in the later eighteenth century that it constituted a veritable "second conquest of America," and was so disruptive of established interests that it prepared the conditions for the movements that later led to Spanish American independence.¹

Our general picture of Spanish American history in the eighteenth century is, then, of colonial regions exposed to a burgeoning Bourbon imperialism, which, by rationalizing the colonial political and economic system in disregard of colonial interests, created a context for the eventual collapse of imperial authority. Does New Granada fit into this picture? We know this was a region that, like others in Spanish America, was directly affected by Bourbon policies designed to change traditional economic and political relations with the parent power; we also know that Bourbon colonial reform generated political tension and resistance, most notably during the Comunero rebellion of 1781. Indeed, historians of colonial Colombia invariably assume that economic and political change during the period of Bourbon rule created tensions that prepared the way to independence, either by inducing or by exacerbating strains in the country's social and political fabric.² But how, precisely, was late colonial Colombia affected by the revival of Spanish imperialism during the eighteenth century? Did Bourbon administrative reform transform the colonial order in New Granada, giving Madrid tighter control over the territory's government and forcing its people to contribute a larger share of their resources to metropolitan needs? Did Bourbon economic reform change the character of the colony's economy, making it contribute more to Spain to the disadvantage of colonial interests? And what, precisely, were the repercussions of Bourbon policies on political attitudes and behavior in the colony? How did colonials react to new metropolitan demands, and what was the character of their response? Can we detect in colonial political behavior any alteration in political culture involving new ideas and principles, perhaps signaling the emergence of a proto-national consciousness that would later surface in the movements for independence?

In addressing these questions, this book will show that, throughout the eighteenth century, the Bourbon monarchy's efforts to tighten Spain's control over New Granada and to enhance exploitation of the region's

1. The best statement of this position is John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826* (2nd ed., London, 1986), chap. I.

2. This argument is forcefully put by Indalecio Liévano Aguirre, *Los grandes conflictos sociales y económicos de nuestra historia* (3rd ed., Bogotá, 1968).

resources were constantly beset by difficulties. At the start of the century, Bourbon ministers found that the colony's government and commerce were in considerable disarray. Under Hapsburg rule the region had been thoroughly hispanicized, but lax government, characterized by corrupt practices and the collusion of Spanish officials with provincial interests, had seriously undermined Madrid's ability to enforce its will. New Granada's economic ties to Spain had also become very tenuous. Trade through the Spanish monopoly had done little to develop exports other than gold, and during the transition from Hapsburg to Bourbon rule a substantial share of New Granada's small markets for European imports was being taken by foreign interlopers through contraband. New Granada was, moreover, a large, diverse, and loosely integrated territory, where the division of power among provincial governments impeded the imposition of a central command from Spain, and where geographic realities inhibited the construction of clear lines of commerce and communication with Spain.

To bring the colony back under closer Spanish control was, however, beyond the capacity of early Bourbon governments. For although reform started early in New Granada, it proceeded fitfully and was inefficiently applied. Pragmatic reactions to general problems of colonial commerce and defense were followed by reversals of policy and long periods of inaction. The first experiment with viceregal government was short-lived, and the accompanying reform of the colonial commercial system did little to change the colony's economic relations with the metropolitan power. The reestablishment and consolidation of the viceregency at mid-century gave the crown a more solid authority in New Granada, and the simultaneous reform of the commercial system brought a steadier flow of transatlantic trade. However, neither Spanish viceroys nor Spanish merchants substantially altered the position of the colony within the empire. The viceroys gave royal authority a stronger image, but New Granadan government continued to be dominated by a small, conservative colonial establishment in which long-serving officials colluded with local interests in order to enjoy the prerogatives and perquisites of office. New Granada's commercial development was also dominated by vested interests, which, bred in the restrictive practices of Spanish commercial monopoly, sought not to expand commerce but rather to sustain their hold over the existing channels of trade.

During the reign of Charles III, Spanish policy toward New Granada was for the first time shaped within a coherent strategy for controlling the colonies and harnessing their economic and fiscal potential. However, as soon as Madrid made a concerted effort to strengthen the colonial state in New Granada, it encountered a powerful reaction in defense of local autonomy. That reaction, embodied in the Comunero rebellion of 1781,

not only revealed the continuing weaknesses of colonial government, but deflected Madrid from the wholehearted pursuit of plans for restructuring New Granada's administration. And, if rebellion blunted the edge of Bourbon political reform, the Caroline program for imperial economic reform, built around the concept of *comercio libre*, or freer trade within the empire, also failed to transform New Granada into a productive satellite of Spain. Trade with the metropolis expanded, but long-standing obstacles to commercializing and controlling New Granada's resources meant that the regime of *comercio libre* had a limited impact on both the character of colonial commerce and the organization of the region's economic life.

It seems, then, that the picture of late colonial Colombia as a society where metropolitan exploitation and oppression induced major economic changes and generated irreparable political rifts is substantially flawed. In fact, the forces of political change derived more from demonstrations of Spain's debility than from displays of its authority. First, the dissemination by Spanish functionaries of ideas for social and economic improvement, of the kind that Bourbon "Enlightened Despotism" introduced to advance the development of the Spanish nation, combined with the rise of republicanism in North America and Europe to induce a change in the cultural values and political outlook of New Granada's small educated creole minority. At the end of the eighteenth century, Bourbon policy accentuated creole resentment toward colonial government by excluding creoles from positions of power and influence that they felt their birth and education gave them the right to share. At the same time, the transmission of new economic and political ideas through colonial officials, books, and newspapers gave educated creoles tools for criticizing the colonial regime and for developing a new assertiveness. The principles of contemporary science and political economy also encouraged them to identify and classify the character and resources of their land, and this in turn enabled creoles to perceive their country in a new light. Through discussion and exchange of information, they gradually came to conceive of a community with an identity and interests that transcended the narrow, localized boundaries of New Granada's distinctive regions. But if an alternative to Spanish rule was first imagined among New Granada's small creole intelligentsia, the supersession of the colonial order only became possible when metropolitan power collapsed at its center. In the end, it was imperial crisis, rather than reactions against Bourbon absolutism or the foresight of enlightened "precursors," that created the conditions for political emancipation in Colombia.

These observations and arguments, which form the main threads of this book, are elaborated in detail in five separate sections. Part I depicts the contours of New Granada's economy and society during the colonial period. In characterizing the country's social and economic structures, some

Colombian historians have emphasized variations in modes of production. Luis Nieto Areta, for example, distinguishes between "colonial" and "anticolonial" sectors, associated with different patterns of colonization and land tenure. More recently, Salomón Kalmanovitz has analyzed the colonial economy in terms of the social relations that developed between settlers and Indians, landowners and mestizo peasants, and slaveowners and slaves.³ These are valuable interpretative and explanatory approaches, but for the purpose of this analysis, which focuses on New Granada's place within the Spanish empire, I prefer a different approach, one closer to that used by Ospina Vásquez in his economic history of Colombia.⁴ This method characterizes the colonial economy by region, starting from the assumption that each region had its own peculiar structure, based in the history of Spanish and native interaction after the conquest and shaped by local variations in geography, climate, resources, and access to the circuits of overseas trade. Thus, the chapters in Part I depict New Granada's social and economic development during the eighteenth century by outlining the pattern of regions underlying administrative divisions, plotting the provincial contours of economic and social life, and tracing trends in the production of gold, the territory's most valuable commercial commodity.

This portrait of the forms and dynamics of colonial Colombia's economy is complemented, in Part II, by a detailed account of the territory's overseas commerce. This has three parts. The first is an analysis of Bourbon commercial policies and their effects on movements of shipping and trade during the eighteenth century; the second shows how the expansion of commerce affected the exploitation of resources and the development of the territory's economy; a final chapter in this section analyzes the character, evolution, and influence of the mercantile community that handled the territory's overseas trade, focusing especially on the peninsular merchants who dominated trade in Cartagena de Indias, New Granada's leading port.

These essays in the economic history of eighteenth-century New Granada are followed by an account of the territory's administrative and political history during the late colonial period. Part III examines the principal stages in the evolution of Spanish administrative and fiscal policies during the eighteenth century, from the first experiment with viceregal government in 1719-23, through the permanent re-establishment of the Vice-royalty of New Granada in 1739, to the "revolution in government" planned by Charles III's ministers during the 1770s and 1780s. Discussion of policy change and its institutional and financial implications is paral-

3. Luis Nieto Areta, *Economía y cultura en la historia de Colombia* (6th ed., Bogotá, 1975), chap. 1; Salomón Kalmanovitz, *Economía y nación: Una breve historia de Colombia* (2nd ed., Bogotá, 1986), Part I.

4. Luis Ospina Vásquez, *Industria y protección en Colombia, 1810-1930* (Medellín, 1955).

leled, in Part IV, by analysis of the structures of government, the characteristics of colonial political culture, and the political repercussions of changes in the institutions and ideology of the Hispanic monarchy during the later eighteenth century.

Part Five concludes the study by examining the effects of international war and metropolitan crisis on New Granada's economic and political life at the turn of the century, and by explaining the conditions that made a movement for self-government possible during the years of imperial crisis from 1808 to 1810. A brief epilogue then suggests how the underlying structures of society and economy set down under Spanish rule continued to shape the country's development for at least the first half-century of its existence as an independent republic.

Before proceeding, a word of definition. When referring to eighteenth-century Colombia, I prefer to use the Spanish name "New Granada" instead of the rather cumbersome and anachronistic "colonial Colombia." In fact, New Granada was a title that was attached to several administrative entities of different scale and purpose during the period of Spanish rule. When first established by Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada in the mid-sixteenth century, the *Nuevo Reino de Granada* encompassed the Chibcha lands he had conquered, and did not initially extend far beyond the hinterlands of Santa Fe de Bogotá and Tunja. The name then took on a wider meaning following the establishment of the audiencia of New Granada and the archdiocese of New Granada during the mid-sixteenth century. The audiencia's jurisdiction embraced central and northern Colombia, whereas the southern half of the country, in the huge province of Popayán, came within the jurisdiction of the audiencia of Quito. The archdiocese, on the other hand, linked New Granada to the dioceses of Popayán, Santa Marta, Cartagena, and Mérida. Finally, during the eighteenth century, New Granada became associated with the much larger political entity of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, which incorporated a huge area in its jurisdiction, embracing the audiencias of Quito and New Granada and the captaincy-general of Venezuela. To avoid confusion, the reader should note that my use of the term New Granada follows the usage common among Colombian historians, and refers only to the territory of modern Colombia.