

Latin American Revolutions Activity

1: Background on Latin America

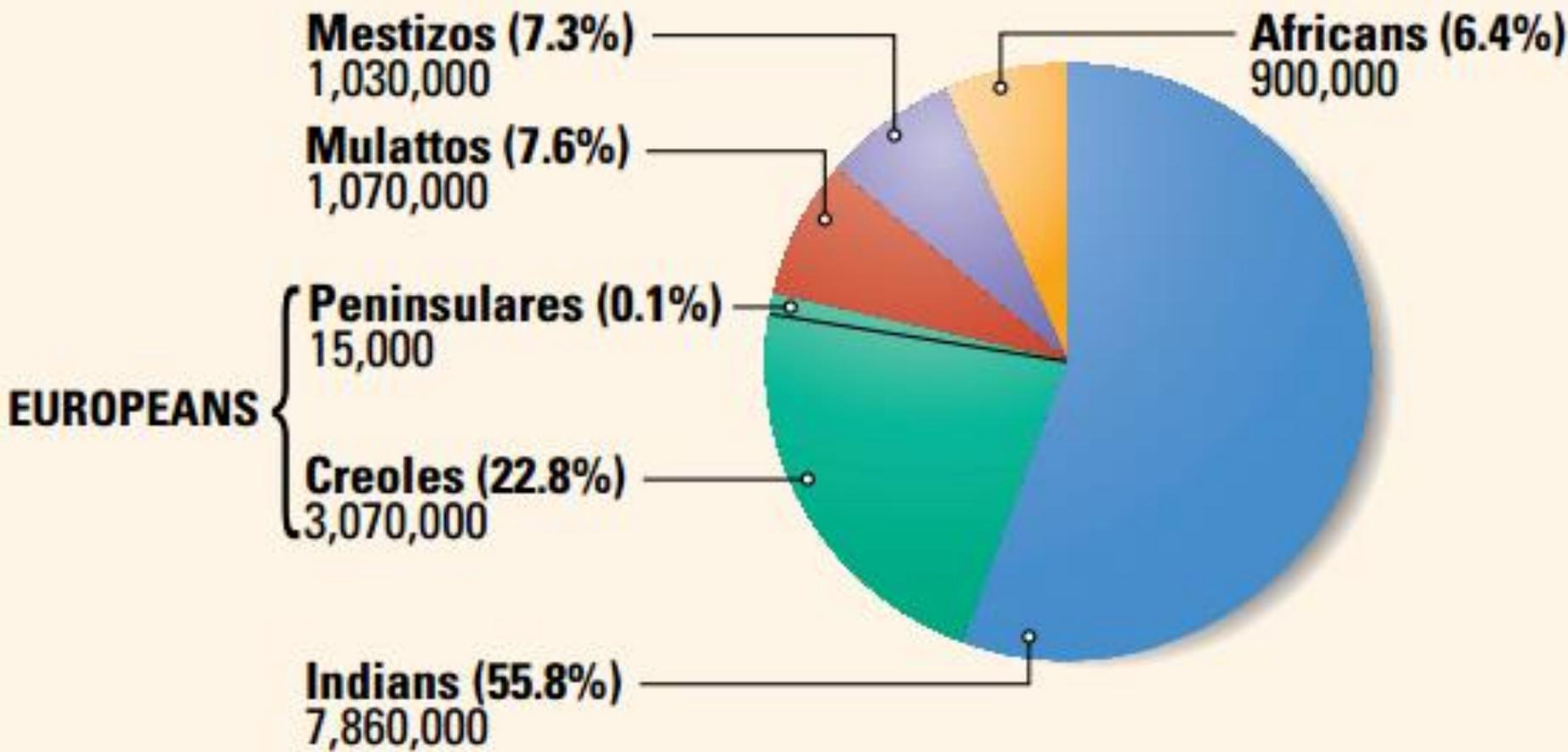
By the late 1700s, the Americas, already troubled by Enlightenment ideas, were electrified by the news of the French Revolution. The French ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity inspired many Latin Americans to rise up against their French, Spanish, and Portuguese masters.

Social Order

Latin American colonial society was sharply divided into classes based on birth. At the top of Spanish American society were the **peninsulares**, men who had been born in Spain. Only peninsulares could hold high office in Spanish colonial government so that Spain could keep the loyalty of its colonial leaders. **Creoles**, Spaniards born in Latin America, ranked after the peninsulares. Creoles could not hold high-level political office, but they could rise as officers in Spanish colonial armies. Together these two minority groups controlled wealth and power in the Spanish colonies.

Below the peninsulares and creoles came the **mestizos** (persons of mixed European and Indian ancestry). Next were the **mulattos** (persons of mixed European and African ancestry) and Africans. At the bottom of the social ladder stood Indians. Unlike enslaved Africans, Indians were of little economic value to the Spaniards. As a result, they were more severely oppressed than any other group.

2: The Divisions in Spanish Colonial Society in 1789



3: Haitian Revolution

The French colony called Saint Domingue was the first Latin American territory to free itself from European rule. Saint Domingue, now known as Haiti, occupied the western third of the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea. Nearly 500,000 enslaved Africans—the vast majority of Saint Domingue’s population (90%)—lived at the bottom of the social system. Most slaves worked on plantations, and they outnumbered their masters dramatically. White masters thus used brutal methods to terrorize slaves and keep them powerless.

The Fight for Freedom

The slaves soon showed that, in fact, they were not powerless. In August 1791, an African priest raised a call for revolution. Within a few days, 100,000 slaves rose in revolt. A leader soon emerged, Toussaint L’Ouverture, an ex-slave. Toussaint rose to become a skilled general and diplomat. It is said that he got the name L’Ouverture (“opening” in French) because he was so skilled at finding openings in the enemy lines.

Haiti’s Independence

Toussaint’s general took up the fight for freedom where Toussaint had left off. On January 1, 1804, they declared the colony an independent country. It was the first black colony to free itself from European control. He called the country Haiti, which meant “mountainous land” in the language of the native Arawak inhabitants of the island.

4: Haitian Revolution Sources

“Men are born and remain free and equal in rights; social distinctions may be based only upon general usefulness. The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and inalienable rights of man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.”

French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 1789 ,Marquis de Lafayette (with the help of his friend Thomas Jefferson)

Population of Enslaved People in Saint-Domingue

1681	1739	1754	1764	1777	1779	1789	1791
2,000	117,400	172,200	206,000	240,000	249,100	452,000	480,000

Total Population in Saint-Domingue

1775	288,000
1787	408,000
1788	455,000
1789	520,000



“Revenge Taken by the Black Army” 1805 Sketch by Marcus Rainsford in “An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Haiti” showing actions taken against the French in Saint Domingue’s war for independence.

5: Napoleon's Impact on Latin America

Napoleon's conquest of Spain in 1808 triggered revolts in the Spanish colonies. After he had removed Spain's King Ferdinand VII, Napoleon made his brother Joseph king of Spain. Many creoles might have supported a Spanish king. However, they felt no loyalty to a king imposed by the French. Creoles argued that when the real king was removed, power shifted to the people.

In 1810, rebellion broke out in several parts of Latin America. In 1814, with the defeat of Napoleon, King Ferdinand VII returned to Spain. But the creoles had already begun their drive for independence. And they would continue until victory.



6: The Libertadores End Spanish Rule

The South American wars of independence produced two brilliant generals. Their leadership largely achieved victory for the rebels. One was Simón Bolívar (see •MAWN boh•LEE•vahr), a wealthy Venezuelan creole. Called El Libertador (Liberator), Bolívar was at the same time romantic and practical, a writer and a fighter.

The other great liberator was José de San Martín. But he too displayed great courage in battle. Though born in Argentina, he spent much of his youth in Spain as a career military officer.

Bolívar's Route to Victory

Simón Bolívar's native Venezuela declared its independence from Spain in 1811. But the struggle for independence had only begun. Bolívar's volunteer army of revolutionaries suffered numerous defeats. A turning point came in August 1819. Bolívar led over 2,000 soldiers on a daring march through the Andes into what is now Colombia. Coming from this direction, Bolívar took the Spanish army completely by surprise. There he won a decisive victory.

By 1821, Bolívar had won Venezuela's independence. He then marched south into Ecuador. In Ecuador, Bolívar would finally meet with José de San Martín. Together they would decide the future of the Latin American revolutionary movement.

San Martín Triumphs and Withdraws

San Martín's Argentina had declared its independence in 1816. However, Spanish forces in nearby Chile and Peru still posed a threat. In 1817, San Martín led his army on a grueling march across the Andes to Chile, which led to its freedom.

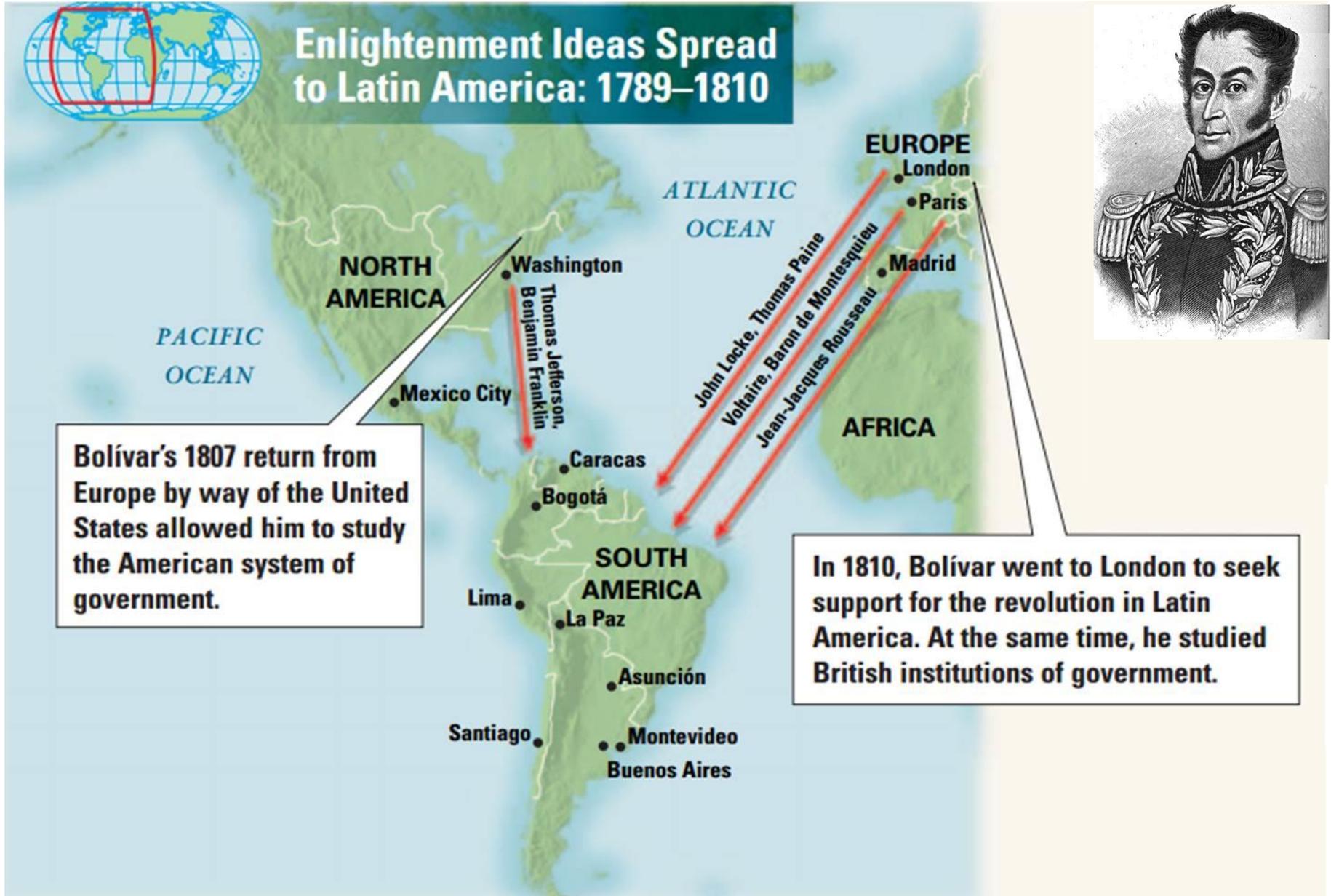
Next, in 1821 San Martín took his army north by sea to Lima, Peru. His plan was to drive out the remaining Spanish forces there. However, he needed a much larger force to accomplish this. This was the problem that faced both San Martín and Bolívar as they met in Ecuador, in 1822.

No one knows how the two men reached an agreement. But San Martín left his army for Bolívar to command. With unified revolutionary forces, Bolívar's army went on to defeat the Spanish at the Battle of Ayacucho (Peru) on December 9, 1824. In this last major battle of the war for independence, the Spanish colonies in Latin America won their freedom.

7: Enlightenment Impacts Latin America



Enlightenment Ideas Spread to Latin America: 1789–1810



Bolívar's 1807 return from Europe by way of the United States allowed him to study the American system of government.

In 1810, Bolívar went to London to seek support for the revolution in Latin America. At the same time, he studied British institutions of government.

8: Mexico's Independence

In most Latin American countries, creoles led the revolutionary movements. In Mexico, ethnic and racial groups mixed more freely. There Indians and mestizos played the leading role.

In 1810, a priest in the small village of Dolores, took the first step toward independence. He firmly believed in Enlightenment ideals. On September 16, 1810, he rang the bells of his village church. When the peasants gathered in the church, he issued a call for rebellion against the Spanish. Today, that call is known as the grito de Dolores (the cry of Dolores).

The very next day, the Indian and mestizo followers began a march toward Mexico City. This unruly army soon numbered 60,000 men. The Spanish army and creoles were alarmed by this uprising of the lower classes. In reaction, they joined forces against Hidalgo's army. They were defeated in 1815.

Events in Mexico took yet another turn in 1820 when a revolution in Spain put a liberal group in power there. Mexico's creoles feared the loss of their privileges. So they united in support of Mexico's independence from Spain. They proclaimed independence in 1821.



“Cry of Dolores”

9: Brazil's Royal Liberator

With no violent upheavals or bloody atrocities, Brazil's quest for independence was unique in this period of Latin American history. In fact, a member of the Portuguese royal family actually played a key role in freeing Brazil from Portugal.

The Portuguese Royal Family in Brazil

In 1807, Napoleon's armies swarmed across the Pyrenees mountains to invade both Spain and Portugal. Napoleon's aim was to close the ports of these countries to British shipping. As French troops approached Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, Prince John (later King John VI) and the royal family boarded ships to escape capture. They also took their court and royal treasury with them. The royal family then sailed to Portugal's largest colony, Brazil.

For 14 years, Brazil was the center of the Portuguese empire. During that time, Brazilians had developed a sense of their own uniqueness. Many of them could not imagine their country becoming a colony again. However, after Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the Portuguese government wanted exactly that. By 1822, creoles demanded Brazil's independence from Portugal. Eight thousand Brazilians signed a petition asking Dom Pedro, King John's son, to rule. He agreed.

On September 7, 1822, he officially declared Brazil's independence. Brazil had won its independence through a bloodless revolution.

