

years 1730 and 1750 the mines were in the height of their prosperity; the King's fifth during some years of that period is said to have amounted to at least a million sterling annually.

The mines which produced this immense wealth at length became gradually less abundant; and, as the precious metal disappeared, numbers of the miners retired, some to the mother-country, loaded with riches, which tempted fresh adventurers, and many to Rio de Janeiro and other sea-ports, where they employed their large capitals in commerce.

Villa Rica at the present day scarcely retains a shadow of its former splendor. Its inhabitants, with the exception of the shopkeepers, are void of employment; they totally neglect the fine country around them, which, by proper cultivation, would amply compensate for the loss of the wealth which their ancestors drew from its bosom. Their education, their habits, their hereditary prejudices, alike unfit them for active life; perpetually indulging in visionary prospects of sudden wealth, they fancy themselves exempted from that universal law of nature which ordains that man shall live by the sweat of his brow. In contemplating the fortunes accumulated by their predecessors, they overlook the industry and perseverance which obtained them, and entirely lose sight of the change of circumstances which renders those qualities now doubly necessary. The successors of men who rise to opulence from small beginnings seldom follow the example set before them, even when trained to it; how then should a Creolian, reared in idleness and ignorance, feel any thing of the benefits of industry! His negroes constitute his principal property, and them he manages so ill, that the profits of their labor hardly defray the expenses of their maintenance: in the regular course of nature they become old and unable to work, yet he continues in the same listless and slothful way, or sinks into a state of absolute inactivity, not knowing what to do from morning to night. This deplorable degeneracy is almost the universal characteristic of the descendants of the original settlers; every trade is occupied either by mulattoes or negroes, both of which classes seem superior in intellect to their masters, because they make a better use of it.

## 6



## COLONIAL POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

**T**HE COUNCIL OF THE INDIES, chartered in 1524, stood at the head of the Spanish imperial administration almost to the close of the colonial period. Under the king the council was the supreme legislative, judicial, and executive institution of colonial government. The principal royal agents in the colonies were the viceroys, the captains-general, and the *audiencias*. Viceroys and captains-general had essentially the same functions; these differed only in accordance with the greater importance and size of the territory assigned to the viceroyalty. Each viceroy or captain-general was assisted in the performance of his duties by an *audiencia*, which was the highest court of appeal in its district and also served as the viceroy's council of state.

Provincial administration in the Indies was entrusted to royal officials who governed districts of varying size and importance from their chief towns and were commonly called *corregidores* or *alcaldes mayores*. The only political institution in the Indies that satisfied local aspirations to self-government was the town council, generally known as the *cabildo*. Despite its undemocratic character, inefficiency, and waning prestige and autonomy, the *cabildo* had potential significance. As the only political institution in which the Creoles (American-born Spaniards) were largely represented, it was destined to play an important role in the Creole seizure of power in the coming age of revolution.

The controlling influence of the Catholic Church in the social and spiritual life of the colonies was deeply rooted in the Spanish past. Royal control over ecclesiastical affairs, in both Spain and the Indies, was founded on the institution of the *patronato real* (royal patronage). As applied to the colonies, this patronage consisted in the absolute right of the Spanish kings to nominate all church officials, collect ecclesiastical tithes, and found churches and monasteries in the Americas

~~some places I have known where they have put in a live toad, and so closed up the jar for a fortnight, or month's space, till all that they have put in him be thoroughly steeped and the toad consumed, and the drink well strengthened, then they open it and call their friends to the drinking of it (which commonly they do in the night time, lest their priest in the town should have notice of them in the day), which they never leave off until they be mad and raging drunk. This drink they call *chicha*, which stinketh most filthy and certainly is the cause of many Indians' death, especially where they use the toad's poison with it. . . .~~

### Life in Indian Villages

And thus having spoken of apparel, houses, eating and drinking, it remains that I say somewhat of their civility, and religion of those who lived under the government of the Spaniards. From the Spaniards they have borrowed their civil government, and in all towns they have one, or two, *alcaldes*, with more or less *regidores* (who are as aldermen or jurats amongst us) and some *alguaziles*, more or less, who are as constables, to execute the orders of the *alcalde* (who is a mayor) with his brethren. In towns of three or four hundred families, or upwards, there are commonly two *alcaldes*, six *regidores*, two *alguaziles mayores*, and six under, or petty, *alguaziles*. And some towns are privileged with an Indian Governor, who is above the *alcaldes* and all the rest of the officers. These are changed every year by new election, and are chosen by the Indians themselves, who take their turns by the tribes or kindreds, whereby they are divided. Their offices begin on New Year's Day, and after that day their election is carried to the city of Guatemala (if in that district it be made) or else to the heads of justice, or Spanish governors of the several provinces, who confirm the new election, and take account of the last year's expenses made by the other officers, who carry with them their townbook of accounts; and therefore for this purpose every town hath a clerk, or scrivener, called *escribano* who commonly continueth many years in his office, by reason of the paucity and unfitness of Indian scribes who are able to bear such a charge. This clerk hath many fees for his writings and informations, and accounts, as have the Spaniards, though not so much money or bribes, but a small matter, according to the poverty of the Indians. The Governor is also commonly continued many years, being some chief man among the Indians, except for his misdemeanors he be complained of, or the Indians in general do all stomach him.

Thus they being settled in a civil way of government they may execute justice upon all such Indians of their town as do notoriously and scandalously offend. They may imprison, fine, whip, and banish, but hang and quarter they may not; but must remit such cases to the Spanish governor. So likewise if a Spaniard passing by the town, or living in it, do trouble the peace, and misdemean himself, they may lay hold on him, and send him to the next Spanish justice, with a full information of his offences, but fine him, or keep him about one night in prison they may not. This order they have against

Spaniards, but they dare not execute it, for a whole town standeth in awe of one Spaniard, and though he never so heinously offend, and be unruly, with oaths, threatenings, and drawing of his sword, he maketh them quake and tremble, and not presume to touch him; for they know if they do they shall have the worst, either by blows, or by some misinformation which he will give against them. . . .

Amongst themselves, if any complaint be made against any Indian, they dare not meddle with him until they call all his kindred, and especially the head of that tribe to which he belongeth; who if he and the rest together find him to deserve imprisonment, or whipping, or any other punishment, then the officers of justices, the *alcaldes* or mayors, and their brethren the jurats inflict upon him that punishment which all shall agree upon. But yet after judgment and sentence given, they have another, which is their last appeal, if they please, and that is to their priest and friar, who liveth in their town, by whom they will sometimes be judged, and undergo what punishment he shall think fittest.

## 5. THE WORLD OF THE SUGAR PLANTATION

*The Jesuit priest João Antonio Andreoni (1650–1715), who went to Brazil in 1667 and spent the rest of his life there, wrote a valuable account of the agricultural and mineral resources of the colony. The following excerpts from Andreoni's book illustrate Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre's point that "the Big House completed by the slave shed represents an entire economic, social, and political system."*

If the plantation owner must display his capacity in one thing more than another, it is in the proper choice of persons to administer his estate. . . .

The first choice that he must make with care, on the basis of secret information concerning the conduct and knowledge of the person in question, is that of a chaplain to whom he must entrust the teaching of all that pertains to the Christian way of life. For the principal obligation of the planter is to teach, or have taught, his family and slaves. This should be done not by some slave born in Brazil, or by some overseer who at best can only teach them their prayers and the laws of God and the Church by word of mouth, but by one who can explain to them what they should believe and what they must do, and how they must do it, and how they are to ask God for what they need.

---

André João Antonil (João Antonio Andreoni), *Cultura e opulencia do Brazil por suas drogas e minas*, ed. Affonso de E. Taunay (São Paulo, 1923), pp. 77–83, 91–102. Excerpts translated by Benjamin Keen.

And for this reason, if he must pay the chaplain a little more than is customary, the planter should understand that he could not put the money to better use. . . .

The chaplain should live outside the planter's house; this is best for both, because he is a priest and not a servant, a familiar of God and not of men. He should not have any woman slave in his house, unless she be of advanced years, nor should he trade in anything, either human or divine, for all this is opposed to his clerical state and is prohibited by various Papal orders.

It is customary to pay a chaplain, when he is free to say masses during weekdays, forty or fifty thousand *reis* a year, and with what he gains from the saying of masses during the week he can earn a respectable salary—and well earned too, if he does all the things described above. If he is expected to teach the children of the plantation owner, he should receive a just additional compensation. . . .

On the day that the cane is brought to be ground, if the plantation owner does not invite the Vicar, the chaplain blesses the mill and asks God to grant a good yield and to guard those who work in it from all misfortune. When the mill stops grinding at the end of the harvest, he sees to it that all give thanks to God in the chapel. . . .

The arms of the plantation owner, on which he relies for the good governance of his people and estate, are his overseers. But if each should aspire to be the head, it would be a monstrous government and would truly resemble the dog Cerberus, to whom the poets fancifully ascribe three heads. I do not say that the overseers should not possess authority, but I say that this authority must be well ordered and subordinate, not absolute, so that the lesser are inferior to the greater, and all to the master whom they serve.

It is fitting that the slaves should understand that the chief overseer has power to command and reprove them, and to punish them when necessary, but they should also know that they have recourse to the master and that they will be heard as justice requires. Nor must the other overseers suppose that their powers are unlimited, especially in what concerns punishment and seizure. The plantation owner, therefore, must make very clear the authority given to each, and especially to the chief overseer; and if they exceed their authority he should check them with the punishment that their excesses deserve—but not before the slaves, lest another time they rise against the overseer, and so that he may not bear the shame of being reprovved before them and hence not dare to govern them. It will suffice if the master lets a third party make known to the injured slave, and to some of the oldest slaves on the estate, that the master was much displeased with the overseer for the wrong that he had committed, and that if he did not amend his ways he would be immediately dismissed.

The overseers must on no account be permitted to kick slaves—in particular to kick pregnant slave women in the belly—or to strike slaves with a

stick, because blows struck in anger are not calculated, and they may inflict a mortal head wound on some valuable slave that cost a great deal of money. What they may do is to scold them and strike them a few times on the back with a liana whip, to teach them a lesson. To seize fugitive slaves and any who fight and slash each other and get drunk, so that the master may have them punished as they deserve, is to show a diligence worthy of praise. But to tie up a slave girl and lash her with a liana whip until the blood runs, or to place her in the stocks or in chains for months at a time (while the master is in the city) simply because she will not go to bed with him, or to do the same to a slave who gave the master a faithful account of the overseer's disloyalty, violence, and cruelty, and to invent pretended offenses to justify the punishment—this may not be tolerated on any account, for it would be to have a ravening wolf rather than a well-disposed and Christian overseer.

It is the obligation of the chief overseer of the plantation to govern the people, and to assign them to their tasks at the proper time. It is his duty to learn from the master who should be notified to cut their cane, and to send them word promptly. He should have the boats and carts ready to go for the cane and should prepare the forms and fuel. He should apprise the master of everything that is needed to equip the sugar-mill before the start of grinding, and when the season is over he should put everything away in its place. He must see that each performs his task, and if some disaster occurs he should hasten to the scene to give what help he can. . . .

The slaves are the hands and feet of the plantation owner, for without them you cannot make, preserve, and increase a fortune, or operate a plantation in Brazil. And the kind of service they give depends on how they are treated. It is necessary, therefore, to buy a certain number of slaves each year and assign them to the cane fields, the manioc fields, the sawmills, and the boats. And because they are usually of different nations, and some more primitive than others, and differ greatly in physical qualities, the assignments should be made with great care. Those who come to Brazil are the Ardas, Minas, Congos, others from S. Thomé, Angola, Cape Verde, and some from Mozambique, who come in the India ships. The Ardas and Minas are robust. Those who come from Cape Verde and S. Thomé are weaker. The slaves from Angola, raised in Loanda, are more capable of acquiring mechanical skills than those who come from the other regions that I have named. Among the Congos there are also some who are quite industrious, and good not only for work in the cane fields but for mechanical tasks and housework.

Some arrive in Brazil very barbarous and dull witted, and continue so throughout their lives. Others in a few years become clever and skillful, not only in learning Christian doctrine but in mastering trades, and they can be used to handle a boat, carry messages, and perform any other routine task. . . . It is not well to remove a slave against his will from the plantation where he has been raised since childhood, for he may pine away and die.

Those slaves who were born in Brazil, or were raised from infancy in the homes of whites, form an affection for their masters and give a good account of themselves; one of these who bears his captivity well is worth four slaves brought from Africa.

The mulattos are even more apt for every task; but many of them, taking advantage of the favor of their masters, are haughty and vicious and swagger about, always ready for a brawl. Yet they and the mulatto women commonly have it best of all in Brazil, because the white blood in their veins (sometimes that of their own masters) works such sorcery that some owners will tolerate and pardon anything they do; not only do they not reprove them, but it seems that all the caresses fall to their share. It is hard to say whether the masters or the mistresses are more at fault in this respect, for there are some of both sexes who permit themselves to be ruled by mulattos, and not those of the best sort, either, thus verifying the proverb that says that Brazil is the Hell of the Negroes, the Purgatory of the Whites, and the Paradise of the mulattos—but let some distrust or feeling of jealousy change love into hatred, and it comes forth armed with every kind of cruelty and severity. It is well to make use of their capabilities, if they will make good use of them (as some do, to be sure), but they should not be treated with such intimacy that they lose respect, and from slaves turn into masters. To free mulatto women of loose habits is surely an iniquitous thing, because the money with which they purchase their freedom rarely comes out of any other mines than their own bodies, and is gained with repeated sins; and after they are freed they continue to be the ruination of many.

Some masters are opposed to the marriage of male and female slaves, and they not only are indifferent to their living as concubines but consent and actually encourage them to live in that state, saying; “You, so-and-so, will in due time marry so-and-so”; and after that they permit them to live together as if they were already man and wife. It is said that the reason why masters do not marry such couples off is because they fear that if they tire of the match they may kill each other with poison or witchcraft, for among them there are notable masters of this craft. Others, after marrying off their slaves, keep them apart for years as if they were unwed, and this they cannot do in good conscience. Others are so negligent in what concerns the salvation of the slaves that they keep them for a long time in the cane fields or at the sugar mill without baptism. Furthermore, of those who have been baptized, many do not know who is their Creator, what they should believe, what law they should observe, how to commend themselves to God, why Christians go to Church, why they adore the Church, what to say to the Father when they kneel before him and when they speak into his ear, whether they have souls and if these souls die, and where they go when they leave the body. . . .

In what concerns food, clothing, and rest from labor, clearly these things should not be denied them, for in all fairness the master should give a servitor

sufficient food, medicine for his sicknesses, and clothing so that he may be decently covered and not go about half-naked in the streets; he should also regulate their labor so that it is not beyond their strength and endurance. In Brazil they say that the slaves must have the three P’s, namely, a stick, bread, and a piece of cloth (*páo, pão, e panno*). And though they make a bad beginning, commencing with the stick, which stands for punishment, yet would to God that the bread and clothing were as abundant as the punishment! For it is frequently inflicted for some offense not wholly proved, or else invented, and with instruments of great severity (even if the crimes were proved), such instruments as are not used on brute beasts. To be sure, some masters take more account of a horse than of a half dozen slaves, for the horse is cared for, and has a groom to find him hay, and wipe his sweat away, and a saddle, and a gilded bridle. . . .

Some masters have the custom of giving their slaves one day a week to plant for themselves, sometimes sending the overseer along to see that they do not neglect their work; this helps to keep them from suffering hunger or from daily milling about the house of the master to beg him for a ration of flour. But to deny them both flour and a day for planting, and to expect them to work in the fields by day, from sunrise to sundown, and in the sugar mill by night, with little rest from labor—how shall such a master escape punishment before the Tribunal of God? If to deny alms to one who needs it is to deny it to Christ our Lord, as the Good Book says, what must it be to deny food and clothing to one’s slaves? And how shall that master justify his conduct, who gives woolens and silks and other fineries to her who works his perdition and then denies four or five yards of cotton, and a few more of woollen cloth, to the slave who dissolves in sweat to serve him, and barely has time to hunt for a root and a crab-fish for his meal? And if on top of this the punishment is frequent and excessive, the slaves will either run away into the woods or commit suicide, as is their custom, by holding their breath or hanging themselves—or they will try to take the lives of those who do them such great evil, resorting, if necessary, to diabolical arts, or they will clamor so loudly to the Lord that he will hear them and do to their masters what he did to the Egyptians when they vexed the Jews with extraordinary labor, sending terrible plagues against their estates and sons, as we read in the Sacred Scripture. . . .

Not to punish their excesses would be a serious fault, but these offenses should first be verified, so that innocent people may not suffer. The accused should be given a hearing, and if the charges are proved the culprits should be chastised with a moderate lashing, or by placing them in chains or in the stocks for a short period. But to punish them over hastily, with a vengeful spirit, with one’s own hand, with terrible instruments, and perhaps to burn them with fire or heated sealing wax, or to brand the poor fellows in the face—why, this is intolerable in barbarians, to say nothing of Christian Catholics. . . . And if, having erred by reason of their frailty, they themselves

come to beg the master's pardon, or find sponsors (*padrinhos*) to accompany them, in such cases it is customary in Brazil to pardon them. And it is well for them to know that this will obtain them forgiveness, for otherwise they may one day flee to some fugitive slave settlement (*mucambo*) in the forest, and if they are captured they may kill themselves before the master can lash them, or some kinsman will take it upon himself to avenge them by the use of witchcraft or poison. Completely to deny them their festivities, which are their only consolation in their captivity, is to condemn them to sadness and melancholy, to apathy and sickness. Therefore masters should not object if they crown their kings and sing and dance decently for a few hours on certain days of the year, or if they amuse themselves in proper ways of an afternoon, after having celebrated in the morning the holiday of Our Lady of the Rosary, of Saint Benedict, and of the patron-saint of the plantation chapel. . . .

Since the management of a sugar plantation requires so many large outlays, as described above, it is plain that the owner must carefully watch the expenses of his household. . . .

It is a poor thing to have the reputation of being a miser, but it is no credit to bear the name of a prodigal. He who decides to assume the burdens of a plantation must either retire from the city, shunning its diversions, or maintain two houses—which is notably deleterious to the one from which he is absent and also doubly expensive. To keep one's sons on the plantation is to create country bumpkins who can only talk of dogs, horses, and cattle. To leave them in the city is to permit them to fall into vicious habits and contract shameful diseases that are not easily cured. To avoid both extremes, the best course is to place them in the household of some responsible and honorable relative or friend, where they will have no opportunity to make a false step—a friend who will faithfully keep the parent informed of their good or bad conduct and of their improvement or neglect of their studies. The lad's mother should not be permitted to send him money or to send secret orders for that purpose to the father's correspondent or cashier; nor must it be forgotten that money requested for the purchase of books can also be used for gambling. The father should therefore instruct his attorney or agent not to give the boy anything without his order. For these young fellows can be very ingenious in their pleas for money, and can devise all manner of plausible reasons and pretexts, especially when they are supposed to be engaged in some course of studies. They are perfectly willing to spend three years of pleasant life at the expense of their father or uncle, who is in his sugarcane fields and has no idea of what goes on in town. So when a father boasts that he has an Aristotle in the Academy, it may be that he really has an Asinius or an Apri-cius in the city. But if the father decides to keep his children at home, content to let them learn to read, write, and count, together with some knowledge of events or history, to enable them to converse in company, he should not fail

to watch over them, especially when they reach a certain age. For the broad countryside is also a place of much freedom, and can breed thistles and thorns. And if one constructs a fence for cattle and horses to keep them from leaving the pasture, why should one not keep children within bounds, both inside and outside the house, if experience proves that it is necessary? . . . The good example of the father, however, is the best lesson in conduct; and the surest means of achieving peace of mind is to marry off the girls, and the boys as well, at the proper time. If they are content to marry within their station, they will find houses where they can make good matches and receive their rewards.

## 6. THE FREE POPULATION

*Freemen and slaves formed the two great legal categories into which the Brazilian colonial population was divided. However, not all freemen belonged to the master class. Perhaps the most hopeful feature of Brazilian colonial life was the gradual blurring of the color line through race mixture—a circumstance that gave free mulattos and other mixed bloods a greater social mobility than was possible in any other slave society of modern times.*

In the Portuguese South American dominions, circumstances have directed that there should be no division of castes, and a very few of those degrading and most galling distinctions which have been made by all other nations in the management of their colonies. That this was not intended by the mother country, but was rather submitted to from necessity, is to be discovered in some few regulations, which plainly show that if Portugal could have preserved the superiority of the whites, she would, as well as her neighbors, have established laws for that purpose. The rulers of Portugal wished to colonize to an unlimited extent: but their country did not contain a population sufficiently numerous for their magnificent plans. Emigrants left their own country to settle in the New World, who were literally adventurers; for they had not any settled plans of life, and they were without families. Persons of established habits, who had the wish to follow any of the ordinary means of gaining a livelihood, found employment at home; neither could Portugal spare them, nor did they wish to leave their native soil. There was no superabundance of population: and therefore every man might find occupation at home, if he had steadiness to look for it. There was no division in political or

could not compete. Contraband trade, never completely eliminated under the Bourbons, reached vast proportions during the frequent intervals of warfare in which British naval power swept Spanish shipping from the seas.

The most important Bourbon political reform was the transfer to the colonies, between 1782 and 1790, of the intendant system, already introduced in Spain from France. The intendants (provincial governors) were expected to relieve the overburdened viceroys of many of their duties, especially in financial matters, and to develop agriculture, industry, and commerce and generally to promote the welfare of their respective districts. Many of the viceroys and intendants of the reform period were able and progressive men, devoted to the interests of the crown and their subjects. But the same cannot be said of the majority of their subordinates, who, like their predecessors, the *corregidores*, soon became notorious for their oppressive practices. Following the triumph of reaction in Spain after 1788, the familiar evils of administrative corruption, mismanagement, and indifference to the public interest reappeared on a large scale in the colonies, as in Spain.

The Creole upper class enjoyed greater opportunities for material and cultural enrichment in the Bourbon era, but the same was not true of Indians, *mestizos*, and other laboring groups. The intolerable conditions of the common people led to major revolutionary outbreaks in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia (1780–1783) that were sternly suppressed by Spanish arms.

### 1. THE BOURBON COMMERCIAL REFORMS

*The Bourbon reforms in the field of colonial trade represented a supreme effort to recover for Spain a dominant position in the markets of Spanish America. The reform program provided for a stricter enforcement of the laws against contraband; more importantly, it included a series of measures designed to liberalize the commerce between Spain and its colonies while retaining the principle of peninsular trade monopoly. The Bourbon reforms, combined with a rising European demand for Spanish American products, helped expand colonial trade and prosperity in the last half of the eighteenth century. The Mexican historian Lucas Alamán surveys the beneficial effects of these reforms on the commerce of New Spain.*

Commerce with Spain, the only one that was permitted, was restricted until 1778 to the port of Cadiz, where were assembled, under the inspection of the *audiencia* and the House of Trade of Seville, all the goods bound for

---

Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Méjico*, 5 vols. (México, 1849–1852), 1:109–110, 110–113. Excerpt translated by Benjamin Keen.

America. They were carried there in the fleets, which departed each year and whose routes were minutely prescribed by the laws, and in the interval there was no other communication than that of the dispatch boats and the store-ships coming with quicksilver. On the arrival of the fleets a great fair was held at Panama, for all South America, and another in Jalapa for New Spain, whence this town acquired the name of Jalapa of the Fair.

This order of things gave rise to a double monopoly: that enjoyed by the houses of Cadiz and Seville which made up the cargoes and that which was secured at the fairs by the American merchants, who made agreements among themselves whereby particular merchants acquired complete control over certain lines of goods. Since the supply of these goods was not renewed for a long time, it was in their power to raise prices at will, whence arose the high prices of some commodities, especially when maritime war prevented the arrival of the fleets for several years. This condition gave occasion for the arbitrary measures of certain viceroys in fixing retail prices in favor of the consumer, as was done by the second Duke of Albuquerque in 1703.

Commerce with Asia was reduced to a single vessel, known as the “China-ship,” which was sent once a year from Manila and, passing in sight of San Blas, arrived at Acapulco, to which came the buyers for the fair that was held there; after the fair it sailed again, carrying the cash proceeds of the sale of the goods that it had brought, the subvention with which the royal treasury of Mexico aided that of Manila, the criminals condemned to serve time in those islands, and those dissipated youths whom their families had consigned to this kind of exile as a disciplinary measure, called “being sent to China.” Commerce between New Spain and Peru, Guatemala, and New Granada by way of the Pacific was prohibited for a variety of reasons.

By the ordinance of October 12, 1778, all this system of commerce with Europe was changed. The fleets ceased to come, the last being the one that arrived at Vera Cruz in January of that year, under the command of Don Antonio de Ulloa, so celebrated for his voyage to Peru and his secret report to the king on the state of that kingdom. Commerce thus became free for all Spanish ships sailing from habilitated ports in the peninsula, but it could only be carried on in New Spain through the port of Vera Cruz, and European goods could not be introduced from Havana or any other American place but must be brought directly from Spain.

The results of this change were very important, not only because of the abundance of goods and price reductions that it yielded but also because it ended the monopoly and the vast profits acquired with little labor by the *flotistas*, the name given to the monopolists. These men, finding it impossible to continue their former practices, retired from commerce and invested their capital in agriculture and mining, which they greatly stimulated, especially the latter. Their places were taken by a larger number of individuals, who in order to prosper had to display much activity, and thus instead of a few large

capitals there arose many small ones, which, distributed among all the towns, contributed largely to their betterment.

In this same period were lifted the odious restrictions on commerce among the provinces or kingdoms of America; and a royal decree of January 17, 1774, promulgated in the Prado, conceded freedom of trade in the Pacific, though only in the goods and productions of the respective provinces. Later declarations broadened this freedom, removing the restrictions imposed by the aforementioned order in regard to European and Asiatic goods. . . .

The exclusive colonial system of Spain provided great and valuable compensations for the prohibitions that it imposed. If one glances at the balance of trade of Vera Cruz, the only port habilitated in that period for trade with Europe and the West Indies, for the year 1803, one of the last years of peace with England, it will be seen that of the total exports to Spain, worth 12,000,000 pesos, more than a third, or 4,500,000, were in the form of produce, including not only 27,000 *arrobas* of cochineal of a value of 2,200,000 pesos but also 150,000 pounds of indigo, worth 260,000 pesos, and 500,000 *arrobas* of sugar of the value of 1,500,000 pesos, besides 26,600 *quintales* of logwood and 17,000 *quintales* of cotton. Among the exports to various points in America one notes 20,000 *tercios* of flour, 14,700 *varas* of coarse frieze, 1,300 *varas* of baize, 1,760 boxes of soap, and 700 boxes of ordinary Puebla chinaware; all this, with other minor articles, comes to a value of more than 600,000 pesos a year.

The effect of these exports was to give a great value to the sugarcane plantations, while the flour of Puebla, flowing down to Vera Cruz to satisfy not only the needs of that place but also those of Havana, the other islands, and Yucatan, left the provisioning of the markets of Mexico City to the wheat fields of Querétaro and Guanajuato, adding to their value and bringing prosperity to the wheat farmers of those provinces. All this active traffic infused animation and life into our internal commerce. Mexican agriculture today would gladly exchange the sterile freedom to cultivate vines and olives for an exportation of 500,000 *arrobas* of sugar and 20,000 *tercios* of flour.

## 2. THE REVIVAL OF MINING

*The eighteenth century saw a revival of the silver mining industry in the Spanish colonies. Peru and Mexico both shared in this advance, but the Mexican mines, where production had been rising quite consistently since the sixteenth century, forged far ahead of their Peruvian rivals in the Bourbon era. As with agriculture, the increase in production did not result from improved technique but rather the opening of many new as well as old mines and the growth of the labor force. Although the Bourbon*

*kings and their colonial agents exerted themselves to overcome the backwardness of the mining industry, their efforts were largely frustrated by the traditionalism of the mine owners and a lack of capital to finance necessary changes.*

Since the brilliant period of the reign of Charles V, Spanish America has been separated from Europe, with respect to the communication of discoveries useful to society. The imperfect knowledge which was possessed in the 16th century relative to mining and smelting, in Germany, Biscay, and the Belgic provinces, rapidly passed into Mexico and Peru, on the first colonization of these countries; but since that period, to the reign of Charles III, the American miners have learned hardly anything from the Europeans, but the blowing up with powder those rocks which resist the pointrole. This King and his successor have shown a praiseworthy desire of imparting to the colonies all the advantages derived by Europe from the improvement in machinery, the progress of chemical science, and their application to metallurgy. German miners have been sent at the expense of the court to Mexico, Peru, and the kingdom of New Granada; but their knowledge has been of no utility, because the mines of Mexico are considered as the property of the individuals, who direct the operations, without the government being allowed to exercise the smallest influence. . . .

After the picture which we have just drawn of the actual state of the mining operations, and of the bad economy which prevails in the administration of the mines of New Spain, we ought not to be astonished at seeing works, which for a long time have been most productive, abandoned whenever they have reached a considerable depth, or whenever the veins have appeared less abundant in metals. We have already observed, that in the famous mine of Valenciana, the annual expenses rose in the space of fifteen years from two millions of francs to four millions and a half. Indeed, if there be much water in this mine, and if it require a number of horse *bari-tels* to draw it off, the profit must, to the proprietors, be little or nothing. The greatest part of the defects in the management which I have been pointing out, have been long known to a respectable and enlightened body, the Tribunal de Minería of Mexico, to the professors of the school of mines, and even to several of the native miners, who without having ever quitted their country, know the imperfection of the old methods; but we must repeat here, the changes can only take place very slowly among a people who are not fond of innovations, and in a country where the government possesses so little influence on the works which are generally the property of individuals, and not of shareholders. It is a prejudice to imagine, that

Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, 4 vols. (London, 1822–1823), 3:231–246.