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## 3 colonial structure

How did colonialism work? How might it affect the world today?

Well, other than the terrible working conditions, what was so bad about colonialism?



Colonialism organized whole societies in ways that still make a difference today.

### THE SEVEN PILLARS OF COLONIALISM

#### 1 Grabbing the Land

The most important colonial aim in both Mexico and Peru was to grab the resources (including land) from the people who lived there. This resource-grab also included the labour of the people, who were expected to make the colonists and mother country rich by contributing free, or almost-free, labour.

##### Think about it:

The creation of huge plantations owned by a few people might have some effect later on. Can you think what that effect would be?.

#### 2 Growing for Europe

When the conquistadores arrived in Latin America, a wide variety of corns, squashes, cassava and other crops were grown. The people were well-fed and healthy. But you wouldn't find many Spaniards who wanted to eat cassava! So the crops were replaced by a single crop to be sent to the colonizing country: sugar, tobacco, or rubber.

##### Think about it:

What are the drawbacks to relying on a single crop? to growing crops for export?

#### 3 Developing Europe

The minerals and crops produced in the colonies were all loaded on ships for "home." The riches of Latin America were used to develop Europe.

##### Think about it:

How might things be different today if these resources had been used to develop Latin America?

#### 4 Consuming Colonially

The purpose of colonies, as well as to provide raw materials to enrich the mother country, was to buy the products manufactured in the mother country (at a high price, of course). So local industries weren't encouraged in the colonies.

##### Think about it:

How might the lack of industries affect these countries today?

#### 5 Hatching Hierarchies

The whole system in the colonies depended on a small number of rich colonists at the top, and large masses of poor native people and African slaves on the bottom. The rich dined lavishly on silver platters, while the poor were lucky to get anything at all!

##### Think about it:

How would this "elite" affect development later on?

Source: Gage, S. (1991.) Colonialism in the Americas. Canada: VIDEA. Part of the excellent series, *Colonialism: a Critical Look*, which includes titles on Africa, the Americas and Asia. Write to: Victoria International Development Education Association (VIDEA), 407-620 View Street, Victoria, B.C., Canada, V8W 1J6, (604) 385-2333.

## 6 Killing Cultures

Although the conquerors were small in number, they made everyone learn their language, they converted everyone (often with threats) to their religion, and they outlawed much of the culture and tradition of the native people.



"Well, my goodness, you can't be a civilized person unless you speak Spanish, worship Jesus, and wear clothes!"

**Think about it:**  
What effect might this policy of "ethnocide" have on the way that the native people feel about themselves and their culture?

## 7 Exploiting the Land

In all parts of the world, explorers discovered indigenous people who felt themselves connected to the land and to other creatures in a spiritual sense. They did not regard the land as "property" or "exploitable resources," but as a fertile source of life. The colonizers, on the other hand, thought differently.

"Land, give me land! I want to own it, I want to mine it, I want to chop the trees down and grow tobacco on it. This land will make me rich!"



**Think about it:**  
How might this "grab & exploit" attitude towards land have an effect today?

## IDEAS

- (1) Divide into seven groups, with each group taking one of the "pillars". Discuss the "Think about it" question for your pillar. On a piece of chart paper, draw a picture that can explain your response to the question to the rest of the class. Hang the pictures throughout the classroom. Select two representatives to stay with your drawing and explain it as everyone else circulates and asks questions. Half way through the exhibit time, two other members of the group should stay with the drawing so that the initial two can circulate.
- (2) Use the readings in Section 3 to explore the implications of these pillars.
- (3) To conclude Section 3, working in the same small groups formed in #1 above, prepare a bulletin board. Use excerpts from the readings in Section 3 or other sources to explain each pillar. Each pillar should be explained with a contemporary and an historical example, so as to describe the contemporary legacies of colonialism. See the sample below for Pillar #4: Consuming Colonially.

## 4 Consuming Colonially

Many westerners think that the purpose of colonialism was to lead "backward" countries into the industrialized age. But when you look at the real purposes of colonialism, you'll soon see that the last thing that the European countries wanted was competition from the colonies. They wanted to be able to sell manufactured goods made in Europe to the colonies.

### Keeping Tabs on Textiles

#### Then

1785, Lisbon, Portugal:  
The Portuguese crown orders Brazil's textile workshops closed down; in the future they must only produce rustic clothing for slaves.

*My Dear Subjects,  
If Brazil keeps on producing fine clothes, the inhabitants will become totally independent of Portugal. Please stop.  
Her Majesty*

#### Now

Since they became independent, Latin American countries have struggled to change from resource-based economies (economies which ship out products raw). But it's not easy. The machinery and technical advice must often be imported, and it's hard to find the money to build. So often countries which started out as colonies still continue to be raw exporters. Brazil is the world's largest exporter of coffee, and also a major exporter of cotton, cocoa and sugar.