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**Why were people in Spanish colonies frustrated with their mother country?**

**Directions:** In the 1600s and 1700s, many people were frustrated with their rulers. In colonies, people with power (whites) and people without power (slaves and Native Americans) were frustrated with their European mother countries. While reading, explain how each situation in Spanish colonies (in North and South America and the Caribbean) could cause risks for Spain and the people in Spanish colonies.

Latin America is an area of land that includes Central America and South America. Spain conquered most of Latin America in the 1500s, and then Latin America was divided up into several colonies that Spain controlled. The system of trade between Spain (mother country) and Latin America (colonies) was known as **mercantilism**.

This diagram shows how it worked 🡪

The mother country sent its people to the colony. Then, they forced the Native Americans to be slaves and get raw materials (digging up metals, cutting down trees, growing crops). If Native Americans died, the Spanish bought African slaves and brought them across the Atlantic Ocean to be as slaves in Latin America. The mother country forced their colonies to sell raw materials to the mother country (for low prices) to be turned into manufactured goods like furniture, tools, machines, ships, clothing, weapons, and jewelry. The mother country made money by selling manufactured goods (at high prices) back to the people in the colonies. If the colonists could not afford the high prices, they had to borrow money from banks in the mother country, so they were now in debt to their mother country. This is how **mercantilism** worked.

But the Creoles (whites) who were born in the colonies were not happy with **mercantilism**. This document was written by a merchant living in a Spanish colony. (“America” means Spanish colonies in America, not the United States)

Spanish restrictions on travel and commerce cuts America off from the rest of the world [limiting] our basic personal and property rights…We in America are perhaps the first to be forced by our own government [Spain] to sell our products at artificially [fake] low prices and buy what we need at artificially high prices. This is the result of the Spanish commercial monopoly system [mercantilism], combined with taxes and official fees. And because the official monopoly [control] on transatlantic trade would naturally lead us to produce more in America, the government has been careful to place limitations on what we can legally produce [for example, tequila was banned, so colonists had to buy wine and beer from Spain]…

Source: Juan Pablo Viscardo, An Open Letter to America, written in 1791 and published in Latin America in 1801.

There were other problems for the Creoles – they were afraid of revolutions by their slaves and the Native Americans. When the Spanish needed a legal way to treat Natives and Africans worse than whites, they created the **Castas**, a social class system based on the location of your ancestors and your family. The social class structure was rigid. Social mobility [moving up] was impossible, because your social class was based on your race and your birth. The most powerful people were the Peninsulares (people born in Spain) and they controlled the colony. But the next most powerful group was the Creoles, who were light skinned, around 20% of the population, and owned haciendas [farms] and businesses in the colonies. But they were afraid that if they rebelled against Spain and the Peninsulares to get more rights, it could lead to Native Americans, Africans, Mestizos, and Mulattoes demanding more rights and fighting back against the Creoles who controlled them.

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**Peninsulares  - Spanish Nobles**

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**Creoles – Spanish people born in Colonies**

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**Mestizos (White/Indian)**

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**Mulattoes (White/African)**

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**Native American Indians**

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**African Slaves**



1) How did the Spanish colonial system create risks for the Creole elites in Spain’s colonies?

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