Latin American Music: An Overview

Chapter Summary

Introduction

Indigenous Cultures Before 1492
- Pre-Columbian Music

1492 and the Advent of Syncretism
- The White Legend and the Black Legend
- The Emergence of Mestizo Culture
- Mestizo Music
- European Culture in America
- The Emergence of African Culture
- Religious Syncretism

Modern Native Societies
- Indigenous Music Today

Latin America Today
Introduction

If you have cracked open the pages of this book, you have undoubtedly, at some point in your life, been intrigued, moved or even excited by the sounds and rhythms of Latin America. You may also be aware, by the same measure, of the vast diversity of musical styles and genres that pervade the Western Hemisphere. The study of Latin American music can be tremendously fulfilling, though a one-semester study can only begin to do the subject any justice. The vastness of Latin American music can be appreciated by considering the aesthetic, cultural and geographic range of the following genres, all of which fall under its designation: Argentine tango, Jamaican reggae, 18th Century Latin Masses, Tex-Mex ballads, Peruvian panpipe melodies, Afro-Brazilian drumming and any number of hip hop-derived urban dances that have emerged throughout the continent. These varied styles have in common their creators, Latin Americans all, recipients and transmitters of a particular culture that defines them and provides them a sense of identity.

Music is the expression of people’s lives. It is many other things, too. But at its core, music serves as the conduit for humans to express themselves, to identify to themselves and to others who they are, to establish a sense of belonging. Through music, humans are able to say: “Amidst this huge, imposing world, among this complex set of relationships that make up human civilization, this is who I am.” This reality is no more apparent than in the thousands of musical cultures that have emerged and evolved in Latin America. The slave recalling her ancestral spirits on a far away continent; the Aztec warrior who saw his ancient civilization crumble to dust; the guajiros farmer, forsaken in a distant island, longing nostalgically for the Spanish homeland he would never again see; the modern youth eking out a living in modern urban ghettos; all these individuals were able to say through their music: this is who I am.

The study of Latin American music, like that of all music, requires stylistic and aesthetic considerations. But it also requires reflection on issues of history, geography, religion and ethnicity. A theme that seems to emerge in virtually every Latin American culture is the tension between the “refined” music of the elite and the “coarse” music of the underclass. Latin
American society in general has well-defined social classes that are rarely upset, except by violent political upheavals. The Spanish conquistadors, in their characterization of Aztec and Inca music as “barbaric” and “uncivilized,” were taking their own world-view as absolute standards for musical artistry. In so doing, they were also establishing a long tradition of musical intolerance—quickly adopted by the Portuguese, French, Dutch, English and others—that has pervaded the continent (including the northern part) until modern times. Prejudices have been around for half-a-millennium, and are still present in many Latin American societies. Even today, many consider certain styles, such as Mexican norteños or Puerto Rican reggaetón as “low-class” music. Add to that racial prejudices: “This music is too Black (or too Indian)” is an implied—and occasionally verbalized—judgment often rendered by a country’s elite who are usually of European descent. Yet attitudes change, and another constant seems to be that what one generation considers objectionable, future generations will embrace.

To complicate matters, the accepted distinctions between art, folk and popular music are often problematic in Latin America, where cross-pollination between styles and genres have sometimes rendered their categorization meaningless. Folk music is generally defined as the music of the people, often anonymous and steeped in tradition and community ritual, and associated with the uneducated working classes, usually in rural areas. Popular music typically emerges in urban settings, composed by known individuals, and circulated throughout the community at all levels, often with commercial considerations. Art—or classical—music has traditionally been defined as the music of the elite and educated members of a society, a music that is studied, written down and performed in more formal settings. But what is one to make, for example, of the Martinican kwadril, a dance derived from the classical balls of the 18th century French salons, integrated into the Afro-Caribbean folk drumming traditions, and one of the source components of the decidedly popular zouk of recent years? Attempting to classify the kwadril in terms of art, folk or popular music seems a rather artificial endeavor, though it does illustrate the process of transformation the style, like so many others, has undergone.

This process of transformation is the result of intricate social and economic factors that affect composers, performers and audiences. Much of the music of Latin America began as folk music, typically learned at a young age by a member of the community, and perhaps specifically tied to
a ritual that emerged in the context of the church, the village, the farm, the plantation or the slum. But in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, these traditions were greatly affected by the economic development that engulfed the continent and the pronounced urban migration that ensued. Time and again, we find examples of rural people migrating to urban areas, bringing their music with them. Invariably, the result is a new style of music, distinct from that of the city dwellers that were already there, but also different from the country dances and ballads the migrants left behind. For whenever rural folk traditions transform into urban styles, its performers often abandon the ritual and religious context of the music. The urban \textit{samba} of Brazil, the Andean \textit{huayno} and \textit{sanjuan}, the Argentine \textit{cuarteto} and countless others are examples of urban styles associated with those recently-arrived who now constitute a poor, urban underclass.

At about the same time that the great urban migrations were occurring—and not coincidentally—many countries began adopting a distinctly nationalist outlook. Nationalism was a movement that took hold in political, artistic and literary circles in Europe in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. It became an important factor in the Americas in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, as countries across the hemisphere began embracing rural folk music and art as the truest expression of culture, nation or ethnic background. One result was that the art music establishment often adopted these folk styles, and one began finding in the concert hall the \textit{tangos}, \textit{sambas}, \textit{sones} and \textit{rumbas} that had previously been the domain of the village, the \textit{barrio}, the night-club or the carnival parade.

Perhaps more importantly, the folk traditions often also became the preferred form of popular music. Over and over, one can trace the transformation of a given folk music tradition, first into the sophisticated art music of the upper classes, and subsequently into the popular music of the middle classes. By the second half of the twentieth century, dozens of folk music traditions were radically being transformed by the forces of modernization and globalization, undergoing a process of popularization that usually included the infusion of foreign elements, the use of modern electric instruments (usually borrowed from rock-and-roll), and the adoption of a modern pop beat. In the process, many of the traditional elements were abandoned, particularly those that pertained to African or Native elements, as commercial entrepreneurs, in order to appeal to wider middle-class audiences, attempted to modernize and “sanitize” the music.

Almost simultaneously, in different parts of the continent, the Cuban \textit{son} tradition led to \textit{salsa},
Jamaican Rastafarian drumming yielded *reggae*, Andean rhythms infused the Peruvian *chicha*, the Mexican *corrido* engendered *tejano*, and the Trinidadian *calypso* brought about *soca*. (These styles and transformations are all examined in subsequent chapters.)

Yet the process of transformation is often mysterious, its causes frequently left unexplained. Thus, for reasons still unclear, the 1980s and 1990s saw a hemispheric confluence of accordion-based popular styles. The simultaneous rise of the Colombian *vallenato*, Mexican *tejano*, Brazilian *forro*, Argentine *chamamé*, Louisiana *zydeco* and other folk styles into national popularity and even international prominence occurred for reasons that cannot be entirely explained by social, economic, political or aesthetic factors. The accordion, formerly a quintessential folk instrument, all at once seemed to conquer the realm of popular music in Latin America.

Another mystery is the often-irrelevant effect of political borders on the evolution of the continent’s music. Through processes that are hard to distinguish, styles as disparate as the Cuban *bolero*, the Colombian *cumbia*, the Argentine *tango* and Mexican *música ranchera* have spread virtually unencumbered across the continent. Many of these styles are nationalistic in nature, with features that Cubans, Colombians, Argentines or Mexicans proudly identify as uniquely theirs. Yet there is also perhaps something Latin American about these styles that transcends their places of origin, and that appeals to inhabitants of the entire continent, and in some cases, of the entire world. It is tempting to attribute this phenomenon to the fact that adjacent countries have similar cultures and languages. Yet the same process applies to countries that do not share a historical or cultural past. Thus, Jamaican reggae beats, the product of African and English culture, quickly spread through the Spanish, French and Dutch Caribbean, and thereafter to the rest of the world. And dozens of Latin American styles have been adopted at some point by the Anglo-dominated U.S., most famously during the “Latin Craze” of the 1930s and 1940s.

Much of Latin America’s folk music has been transformed and re-created outside of its original context, often in some commercial venue or as an attempt to recover a lost tradition. This transformation does not in any way invalidate the music, or even render it somehow
“inauthentic.” In recent years, Latin America has been a major contributor to the emergence of so-called “world music,” a phenomenon to which some critics and academics have reacted negatively, objecting to its pop orientation, its homogenous uniformity, its mass-media dissemination and its Western influences. By contrast, they regard forms that originate in community rituals as sacred and “authentic” representations of a pure and unadulterated culture. This supplanting of the traditional by the popular is often blamed on the forces of globalization and modernization. In truth, this is undoubtedly so. The meaning of the music in terms of its function and social representation is unquestionably altered by this transformation, and in the process, much of the individuality that brought it about is unquestionably lost. (In reviewing this manuscript, I myself was amazed—and somewhat saddened—to notice how many times I have related that a traditional folk style is now played by electric guitars, bass, synthesizers and drum sets. The incredible diversity of Latin American music is diminished when all the styles adopt essentially the same instrumentation.)

Yet attempting to stop the forces of globalization by rejecting the music it engenders seems a fruitless—even counterproductive—endeavor. For Latin America, globalization began in 1492, and the current trends are only the latest in an evolutionary process that is now over half-a-millennium old. For better or for worse, “world music” is here to stay, and should be recognized and evaluated on its own merits, not excluded from serious study because of its mass-media orientation. Moreover, the issue of authenticity is one that must be treated carefully. To say that a santería drumming ritual in a remote area of Cuba is “authentic” while a glossy, pop-oriented salsa performance at the Latin Grammy Awards is “inauthentic” is to miss the point of the meaning of music. Both extremes—and everything in between—are real music, performed by real musicians in front of real audiences. There is nothing fake—or inauthentic—about either. They are simply different musical expressions of people’s lives, derived from vastly different social contexts. One may, of course, aesthetically prefer one over the other, but they must both be recognized and respected as equally valid musical expressions. They are both important parts of the vast panoply that we call “Latin American Music,” and to ignore one over the other is to paint only half of the picture.
But does this mean one cannot make educated judgments as to the inherent quality of certain types of music? Most critics and musicologists have reached the conclusion, based not on subjective predilection but on the analysis of objective musical evidence, that Wolfgang Mozart was a “better” composer than, say, Antonio Salieri. Can one apply the same informed judgment to the vast array of folk, classical and popular styles in Latin America? Only, I submit, if these judgments are rendered within a genre, not between genres. Clearly, some reggae songs are “better” than others, and some salsa tunes are also “better” than others, based on objective criteria as to what constitutes a good reggae or salsa song. But there is no valid rationale—certainly not the issue of authenticity—to conclude that reggae is a better (or worse) genre of music than salsa. Similarly, there is no basis, other than personal aesthetic preference, to declare that any of the three major categories of music—art, folk and popular—is better or worse than the others.

As you study the various styles and genres found in Latin America, you would do well to temporarily withhold judgment of the musics you encounter, particularly those you are unfamiliar with. Learn as much as you can within each genre. Study the music, listen to the recordings, learn about the customs and rituals that led to the style’s emergence and the social or religious contexts that influenced it. Understand why the music emerged and what function it served. Most importantly, understand what the music meant to the performers and their audiences. Then—and only then—can you start making qualitative judgments about the music you hear; only then will you be able to say “this samba is better than that samba.”

**Indigenous Cultures Before 1492**

Prior to the first major encounter between Europeans and Americans in 1492, the American continent was home to thousands of different cultures whose diversity was as widespread as its geographical landscape. From the tundra of the arctic to Tierra del Fuego in southern Argentina, in arid deserts, steamy jungles and some of the highest mountain ranges in the world, Americans made their homes, raised their families and constructed civilizations. They also made music, in spiritual ceremonies, rites of passage and for their pleasure and entertainment.
Most current theories hold that the American continent was populated during the last ice age, between twelve and twenty thousand years ago. As much of the water froze into glaciers, the ocean level fell revealing a land bridge between Siberia and Alaska called Beringia. Nomadic hunter-gatherers crossed this land bridge from Asia onto the American continent—or perhaps sailed along the coast—finding an uninhabited new land whose rich bounty ensured not only survival but also prosperity. Within a millennium, the entire continent had been populated. Countless hunter-gatherer societies emerged, each developing in time its customs, rituals and musical traditions. As in most—perhaps all—aboriginal societies, the first music-making undoubtedly revolved around either makeshift percussion instruments—perhaps as basic as striking a rock with a stick—or of the human voice: a mother singing a lullaby to her child, a young hunter imitating the song of a bird, a family mourning the death of a parent, or an entire village chanting to unseen forces. The earliest known instruments in the Americas consist of percussion instruments made from gourds, seeds and animal claws or hooves, as well as flutes made from wood, cane, and animal and even human bones.

Many of these hunter-gatherer societies died out as the result of war, famine or migration. Others persisted for millennia, adapting to changing conditions, sometimes surviving the European invasion even into the 20th century (such as the famous Yanomamo who still live in the Venezuelan rain-forest, much as their ancestors did for untold generations). Around 3000 B.C., still others evolved into agrarian societies, domesticating important New World crops—notably potatoes and maize (corn)—which would in time revolutionize the eating habits and the economic development of the entire world. It is from some of these agrarian societies that emerged a few prominent and powerful civilizations whose achievements rivaled and often surpassed those in other parts of the world.

The three leading civilizations on the American continent prior to the arrival of the Europeans were the Mayas from Mesoamerica (a term that literally means “middle America,” and which refers to southeastern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and Honduras); the Aztecs from central Mexico; and the Incas who lived in the Andean region of what is today Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and surrounding areas. These societies created massive architectural monuments, dominant political organizations, and lucrative economic systems. They achieved a high level of military
prowess and governed complex social structures and religious beliefs—usually enforced by powerful clergy—which dictated the everyday life of their inhabitants. They also contained the majority of the population of the Americas, though the exact number remains unknown—and controversial. The number of inhabitants of the American continent in 1492 has been estimated as low as 20 million and as high as more than 100 million.

**Pre-Columbian Music**

Modern students of pre-colonial cultures are hampered by a scarcity of primary documents and artifacts. Any conclusions drawn from these studies, particularly in relation to music, must be taken with caution at the outset, since the record is often incomplete and misleading. Historical events have made the study of Native societies in pre-Columbian times a challenging task. The first wave of destruction came with the conquistadors, who readily seized as much gold, silver and precious objects as they could, in the process destroying many artifacts and monuments. Subsequent European settlers, fearing indigenous uprisings, and preoccupied with forcefully establishing their political and religious dominance, often systematically destroyed as many elements of Native culture as they could, and attempted to change the mindset and philosophies of the Natives, including their musical tendencies. Much of the knowledge that pertained to Native music disappeared, including written manuscripts that described musical ceremonies, carvings of instruments on temple walls, and even a large number of musical instruments. Almost completely lost was the music itself, for pre-Columbian America probably had no system of musical notation, relying instead on oral transmission. Those elements that did survive tended to be filtered through the eyes of Spanish writers, creating an outlook that was rarely complimentary. Since the Conquest, centuries of neglect have further contributed to the demise of cultural elements to the point where only a small fraction of the Native patrimony survives. Thus, while historians, archaeologists and anthropologists have sometimes been able to reconstruct ceremonies and musical instruments, what the music actually sounded like remains mostly a mystery.

**Sidebar: Pre-Columbian Cultures as Seen by Europeans**

In early colonial accounts, music and musical rituals are typically described only when they contravene Christian ideology, and adjectives such as “primitive,” “barbaric,” “demonic” and
“uncivilized” are common. Some descriptions, for example, disparage Native music for its lack of harmony and polyphony, concepts that in 16th and 17th century Spain had reached their highest point of musical artistry. Overly-complex syncopated rhythms were considered barbaric, and dissonances, rather than being judged as part of an overall tonal system, were dismissed as out-of-tune.

The perception of aboriginal cultures did not much improve after the end of the colonial period. Generations of historians and travelers, particularly during the 19th century, often commented on how “primitive” and “backwards” the original inhabitants of the Americas had been, with arguments that frequently took on racist overtones, and which were used as justification for the European colonization of the continent. They argued, for example, that American Native societies had failed to invent the wheel, which had been part of the Western and Middle Eastern world for millennia. Rarely was it pointed out that there were no significant American draft animals to pull carriages, negating the need to invent carriages, thus rendering the wheel by-and-large superfluous. (As it turns out, the abstract concept of a wheel—a circular gyrating mechanical system that repeats a specific task—did in fact exist in the Americas, and could be seen for example in the water and wind-mills of various indigenous groups.) By the same token, the dearth of domesticated animals meant that Americans were not exposed to diseases that evolved from cows, pigs or fowl, and lacking such immunities, became vulnerable to European epidemics in the 16th century. Other factors that contributed to their general state of civilization were the natural and geographic features that isolated the American continent, and the relatively late arrival of its inhabitants.

**Recommended Reading:** For an in-depth exploration of the causes that have led to the emergence of different levels of historical development, read *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, by Jared Diamond (W. W. Norton, 1997).

**End Sidebar**

Modern understanding of Native musical cultures is thus derived from the following sources:

- A few surviving pre-Columbian codices, as well as several post-Conquest volumes written by Native Americans.
- Writings by conquistadors and missionaries who encountered Native cultures.
• Modern studies of pre-Columbian and colonial Native languages, literature, art and history.
• Archaeological studies of pottery, sculptures, murals, tombs, structures and original musical instruments.
• Anthropological studies of musical practices of modern Native groups, many of whom still speak aboriginal languages and maintain traditions only partially modified by five centuries of contact with Europeans.

Because of problematic nature of these sources, and of the huge human diversity on the American continent, few generalizations can be made about its music. Nevertheless some common characteristics emerge from the historical record:

• There were no string instruments in America prior to European contact. Indigenous music was played entirely by wind instruments (aerophones), percussion (idiophones and membranophones) and the human voice.

• Similar instruments could be found in various parts of the continent, including:
  o drums with heads made from the skins of wild animal such as deer or jaguars (since there were no cows, sheep or goats)
  o shakers made from gourds containing shells, pebbles or seeds, the antecedents of the modern maracas
  o rasps made from serrated gourds or hollow sticks, the antecedents of the modern güiro
  o conch shells, used extensively from northern Mexico to Argentina
  o clay whistles and ocarinas
  o flutes, the most prominent melodic instrument, found everywhere including North America, in a large variety of scales and ranges, and made from different materials, including cane, wood and bone. Both notched flutes (with a carved notch in its upper-rim to facilitate blowing) and duct-flutes (with a mouthpiece that directs the player’s breath) were common. The flute was often considered the closest representation of the human voice.

• Native melodies tended to be in high registers with little ornamentation, and little or no harmonic accompaniment.
Native music was often—in some cases almost entirely—related to religious rituals and ceremonies.

Colonial writings focus on the large-scale ceremonial and religious aspect of music, and indicate that the main outlets for Native musical expression were religious ceremonies. Yet music was also a function of everyday life in the village and in the home, and was also associated with war and conquest.

Pre-Hispanic civilizations also had highly developed literature, rhetoric, poetry and drama traditions that reflect an emphasis on metaphor and symbolism, colored by an overpowering faith in the supernatural. The Native view of the universe revealed a fatalistic belief in destiny, underlined by a deep sense of humility and melancholy. Aztec, Maya and Inca mythology purvey a sense of pessimism, both in the relationship between the various deities and between gods and humans. These tendencies towards melancholy and pessimism were remarkably similar to those of the Spaniards’, who reinforced them in subsequent centuries. They can still be found among the music of their modern descendants, particularly in the Andean region. Epic stories display a natural acceptance of suffering, and are reflected in the penitent traditions introduced by the Spanish.

1492 and the Advent of Syncretism
Perhaps the most useful term in the study of Latin American history, culture and music is syncretism, defined as a process of mutual influence and adaptations among different religious or cultural traditions. In a syncretic process, two (or more) cultures merge and combine to form a new culture, drawing from—but wholly distinct from—its sources. A syncretic study of Latin America examines how dozens of groups emerged as the result of a mixture of primarily European, African, and Native cultures, and how these cultures evolved under vastly different historic, economic and social circumstances. In time, a profound cultural and musical fusion came to dominate, and the styles of all three continents came to constitute the musical heritage of most modern Latin Americans.
Yet one must tread carefully when discussing syncretism in the context of a colonial society, for one runs the danger of unconsciously absorbing the prevailing colonial paradigm. It is usually the fact that when a dominant culture melds with a dominated culture, more often than not it is the latter that must adopt the characteristics of the former. Africans and Natives were forced to adopt the customs, languages and religions of the Europeans and not the other way around. But the syncretic process is long and complex, and does not merely involve the adoption of the elements of one culture by another. Rather, it concerns the creation of a third, distinct culture, one in which issues of cultural control are eventually no longer applicable—or at least far less pronounced. Thus, modern Mexico is a syncretic society, dominated by a mestizo culture that is mostly (though not completely) devoid of issues of Spanish and Native cultural domination.

The White Legend and the Black Legend
Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the New World in October 1492 began a process of cultural transformation that continues to this day. The presence of Spain, Portugal and other European nations in the Americas has been controversial almost from their first arrival on the continent. Their exact role continues to elude consensus. As early as the 18th century, two opposing views of the European—and specifically Spanish—role in the development of the American continent emerged, and they continue to inflame passions to this day. The so-called White Legend, formed by conservative, pro-colonial thinkers, emphasizes the achievements of Spanish culture and portrays the Spaniards as saviors, bringing economic prosperity and spiritual salvation to the inhabitants of the New World. By contrast, the Black Legend, product of the liberal, nationalistic movement, sought to dismiss such contributions, depicting the Spaniards as bloodthirsty, opportunistic conquerors bent on the destruction of the Native Americans for the purpose of advancing their own enrichment. Both of these views must be approached cautiously, as neither correctly tells the full story. The truth, as always, can be found somewhere in the middle.

To be sure, Spain’s military powers, maritime abilities, strong nationalism and Catholic faith were major factors in the shaping of the hemisphere. Having triumphantly expelled the Moors in 1492 after more than 700 years of occupation, the Spanish ambition knew no bounds, and the discovery of the American continent that same year was seen as God’s will that Spain should
reach its glorious destiny. At the same time, its European rivals were being overtaken: France and England were occupied with internal political and military struggles, and Portugal was emphasizing its explorations on the Asian route it had recently established. As a result, the Americas in the sixteenth century were wide open for Spanish exploration, conquest, colonization and conversion.

There is a crucial distinction between the Spanish presence in Latin America and that which occurred in the New England colonies. The British and Dutch, seeking religious and economic asylum, came to the northern continent to find new places to live and prosper, for the most part independently from the homeland. They brought with them their possessions, their farming tools, their Bibles and their families. A fairly homogenous transplant of the culture ensued, fueled by the vision of recreating the civilization left behind in the new, bountiful land. The presence of Native populations was contrary to that vision, and as a result these were at first segregated and ultimately mostly eradicated. By contrast, the Spanish conquistadors were not disaffected, religiously persecuted citizens bent on recreating Spain in America. Rather, at least in the first century, they were agents of the Spanish Crown whose mission was to provide new wealth to the national treasury, and emissaries of the Church charged with the salvation of souls. After the initial search for gold had proved illusory, the Spaniards set out to create wealth by intense silver mining operations and agricultural production that required the presence of a large work force. Latin America was “one vast commercial enterprise,” as one historian put it, not a haven for freedom-seekers. Thus, unlike the English and Dutch colonists, the goals of the Spanish emissaries could be attained only by preserving the Native populations, rather than by eradicating them.

The Black Legend incorrectly perpetrated the myth that the Spaniards were intent on causing widespread death and destruction in the new lands. To be sure, the early conquistadors were brutal, violent individuals, usually more interested in gaining personal wealth and power than in any consideration for the Crown treasury. The Black Legend had it right when it told of massive enslavement and exploitation, and the Spaniards certainly did not hesitate to eliminate individuals who got in their way. But they did not set out to wipe out Native societies, as massive genocide was contrary to their vested interests. The Native inhabitants of the colonies were seen
by the Church as potential converts and by the Crown as a source of forced labor. In theory, Native Americans were “free” Spanish subjects, though this status, without means of enforcement, seldom had any relation to the way Natives were treated, and when labor was not given voluntarily, it was extracted by force. Moreover, the brutality of the Spanish Conquest was often somewhat mitigated, even at times restrained, by the presence of missionaries who brought a moral imperative to the Conquest, an imperative unknown to the New England pilgrims and their descendants. In the eyes of the Spanish clergy, the Natives of the American continent were lost children of God who had to be protected both from the violence of the landowners and from the evils of idolatry. Conversion of the Natives was a primary reason for the Conquest itself, one that gave an aura of legitimacy to the Spanish expeditions in the New World.

The Black Legend further accuses the conquistadors of cultural genocide, and in this respect, it is often accurate. Any element of the culture that could lead to national identity or the challenge of authority, or that might perpetuate the Native religions, was usually systematically destroyed. The amount of art, music, poetry, literature and scientific knowledge that was lost to posterity is incalculable. Yet the Spaniards’ aim was not to obliterate the Native civilizations, but rather to subjugate them under Spanish command. Conquerors like Hernán Cortes and Francisco Pizarro quickly recognized that the Aztec and Inca civilizations had been in place for centuries, and were well organized and efficient. Rather than destroying the structures, the Spaniards merely replaced traditional forms of government with their own, preserving many elements of Native society that were the same or similar. Native populations were integrated into colonial society, albeit at its lowest level.

Yet from their first contact with Spaniards, the Native population very quickly began to decrease. The vast majority of deaths that occurred in the first hundred years of the colony were caused not by brutal exploitation but by European diseases inadvertently brought by the invaders and against which Americans had no immunity. Smallpox was introduced by accident on April 23, 1520 when the conquistador Panfilo de Narvaez landed in Veracruz, on the east coast of Mexico. Even casual contact brought contagion, which then traveled rapidly through the countryside, carried by Native traders and envoys. The devastation, once begun, was unstoppable. Fatalities
were catastrophic in especially dense areas, often decimating entire ethnic groups, in the process facilitating the conquest of the territories by the Europeans.

Other diseases quickly followed, including tuberculosis, typhoid, influenza, measles and dysentery. They did not abate after the initial catastrophic contact, but rather continued their deadly march across the continent. Within a few years, millions of Native Americans had died. By the 17th century, population losses of 90% were not uncommon. In Mexico, the Native population declined from an estimated 25 million in 1519 to slightly over one million in 1605. In the Andes, close to 90% of the Inca population expired within a decade of their first contact with Europeans. To this day, heretofore isolated communities in the Amazonian jungle still quickly succumb to European germs they have never before encountered. Whether or not the indigenous populations survived the military and biological conquest affected the subsequent racial and social make-up of the lands they had previously inhabited. Thus, in places like Mexico and Peru, a significant number of Native inhabitants survived the Conquest, while most Caribbean islands quickly lost their entire Native populations.

Sidebar: Racial Syncretism and the Problem of Racial Categories

Perhaps the most important factor in the development of Latin American society was that, unlike the New England colonists, the male Spanish conquerors did not bring their families with them, which very quickly led to a mixing of European, African and American races. The forced mixing of these populations inevitably led to widespread racial syncretism, which almost instantly brought about many levels of discrimination. The ethnic and racial distinctions have been the source of much semantic confusion across the continent, because many countries referred to dissimilar segments of their population by similar names. The most contentious classification—“Indian”—derived from Christopher Columbus’s mistaken belief that he had reached the Asian continent, became pervasive worldwide and remains so to this day. (In this textbook I have avoided using the terms “Indian” and “Amerindian” in favor of the more accurate “Native,” indigenous” or “aboriginal.” Moreover, I use the term “Native American” to refer to the original inhabitants—and their descendants—of the entire continent, not merely those of the United States.)
In places that received large numbers of African slaves such as Brazil and the Caribbean, there emerged a fusion of European and African religion, culture and music called generally *mulatto*. By contrast, in places where the African presence was less pronounced, such as Mexico, Guatemala and Peru, a melding of European and Native characteristics became the dominant culture: the *mestizo*. Together these fusions pervaded every aspect of colonial society, and eventually led to the emergence of modern Latin America.

But the term *mestizo* varies from country to country. In general it refers to a person of mixed European and indigenous ancestry. Yet historically there was also a language and cultural component to the term, and it was understood that *mestizos* spoke Spanish and had adopted European dress and customs, even if they were of pure indigenous ancestry. Conversely, persons of mixed blood but who spoke no Spanish were referred to as *indios*. In the Andean region, lower-class *mestizos* were also referred to as *cholos*, while upper-class persons of mixed ancestry were called *cruzados*. In Central America, *mestizos* are also called *ladinos*, a term originally used in Spain to denote Spanish Jews. In Brazil, a *mestizo* who lived in the interior, spoke Portuguese and interceded with the indigenous populations was called a *caboclo*, whereas a *mestizo* who lived on the coast was called a *cairia*, and was considered socially superior to the *caboclo*. In Louisiana, *mulattos* were legally equivalent to Blacks, while in Haiti and Brazil they traditionally constituted a social and economic elite, enjoying respectable status far above that of the Black population. In Brazil, Venezuela and other countries, *mulattos* were also called *pardos*, or “spotted ones.”

The term *creole* is also problematic. (Its very origins are unknown: it may be derived from the Portuguese *crioulo*—literally someone raised by the master of the house—or it may come from a West African language called *Kreyol*.) In some Spanish–speaking countries such as Mexico and Peru, *criollo* refers to White descendants of the early European settlers—as opposed to the *peninsulares*, those born in the mother country who emigrated to the Americas. But in the West Indies, *creole* came to mean a person of mixed European and African descent, usually speaking a dialect of French, English or Spanish which was also called *creole*. Meanwhile, in the Guyana territories on the South American coast, a *creole* was an American-born descendant of African slaves, as opposed to one born in Africa.
To further complicate matters, the Europeans often set up complex systems of racial classification, which were used for preferential treatment, and which established definitions such as *morisco* or *quadroon* (a person whose ancestry is one-quarter Black), *albino* or *octoroon* (one-eighth Black), etc., as well as *castizo* (a person whose father is a Native and whose mother is European). A person of mixed Native and African ancestry was called *lobo* in Mexico, *zambo* in the Andes, and *griffe* in English-speaking countries. The confusion even extends to White European designations: in Cuba, rural descendants of Spaniards named *guajiros* are unrelated to the *guajiros* of Venezuela and Colombia, the most populous indigenous groups from those countries.

Many of these terms can be offensive to modern sensibilities, having derogatory implications that often allude to cultural or even biological inferiority. (*Mulatto* means “small mule” in Spanish). Enlightened modern societies, while acknowledging socio-historical constructions of race, no longer embrace these distinctions, but rather consider ethnicity in terms of historical, social, economic, political and cultural characteristics. The music of a Trinidadian calypso singer is interesting not because of the blood in her veins, but because of the historical, cultural, religious and aesthetic factors that combined to produce it.

**End Sidebar**

**The Emergence of Mestizo Culture**

The Spanish conquest had been devastating to the Aztec and Inca empires, but many of the Native societies that had been previously subjugated—if they survived the European diseases—welcomed their newfound freedom. Some of them went their own way, retreating to remote areas that had traditionally been their homes, and remaining relatively isolated, often in jungles and rain forests such as the Amazon and in the interior of southern Mexico and Central America. Other groups were mountain-dwellers or desert tribes, for example in the Peruvian Altiplano or the deserts of northern Mexico. These isolated groups continued to preserve their evolving religion, language and customs, and had a greater independence in their historical development.
Most Natives in the Americas, however, did not belong to isolated cultures in remote areas, but rather lived in pre-Columbian urban centers that were now readily accessible to the Europeans. The colonial period was by-and-large not good to them. Millions lost life, resources and ethnic identity through enslavement, missionary evangelization and forced conscription in colonial armies. Often ethnic groups were wholly removed from ancestral lands, forced to adapt to new rural environments or urban centers. Missionaries were constantly on alert to spot and eradicate vestiges of Native religions, while land-owners kept Native cultures on a tight leash, lest a strong nationalist movement emerged that might lead to revolt, something that did occur more than a few times. In time, the gradual emergence of a dominant *mestizo* culture absorbed thousands of Native cultures, and their religions, languages, custom and identities were lost or altered in the process.

Yet some Native societies were able to survive under the yoke of the European occupiers, due to their ability to change and adapt to evolving circumstances, even to thrive in the face of adversity and destruction. Pragmatism was often a central tenet of the Native way of life, of its outlook towards the future. Long-held customs and beliefs could be altered, even abandoned to ensure survival. This process was naturally smoother when both old and new cultures held common facets. While the infusion of Spanish and Portuguese elements drastically influenced Native culture, for example in the alteration of their dress, work and music habits, many aspects of their culture nonetheless managed to survive, such as the Native diet, or the structure of familial interrelationships. Though age-old farming systems were disrupted, agriculture as a practice was generally unaffected by the European presence, and efforts to introduce wheat and other European staples failed to replace the Native dependence on corn. In many cases, lower levels of Native political hierarchy were preserved, as were many traditional features of domestic life.

Conversely, Native populations had an extraordinary influence on colonial society, art and culture. The Native aesthetic, which had been developed and nurtured over centuries, was not eradicated at the time of the Conquest, but was instead channeled in new directions. Their artistic penchants were preserved, and are evident in colonial painting, architecture, sculpture and music. The Natives embraced Spanish crafts and quickly learned to express themselves in European styles and media, so successfully that they often rivaled their Spanish counterparts. Colonial
artistic traditions emerged that syncretically fused elements from both Spanish and Native (as well as African) cultures, complementing the technical and aesthetic elements of each into novel and wholly original syncretic styles.

**Mestizo Music**

The fall of the Aztec and Inca empires forever changed the nature of musical life on the American continent. Native music of subsequent centuries, even that of completely isolated groups, was henceforth devoid of pre-Colombian large-scale ceremonial elements, or of their sophisticated musical systems. But because of their ability to adapt, the Natives reinterpreted their musical traditions and reapplied them to a new reality, recouping whatever musical remnants they could from the debris of their fallen civilizations. Whether in colonial churches, in heavily populated urban centers, or in remote rural villages, thousands of musical traditions continued to evolve in the Americas, all of them syncretic to various degrees.

An important transformative factor was the introduction of string instruments, which, as noted earlier, had been completely unknown on the American continent. The sudden appearance of lutes, rebecs, guitars, violins and harps forced a new approach to timbre, performance technique and instrument construction on the inhabitants of the Andes, whose music was dominated by wind instruments, and those of Mesoamerica, whose music had been percussion-based. Other instruments followed suit, from mandolins and shawms to trumpets, organs and accordions. Similarly, African drums and marimbas had an enormous influence on some Native traditions. Particularly notable is the fact that one European string instrument—the guitar—in time became dominant throughout the continent. These instruments brought not only new sonorities to the region, but also new ways of combining different sonorities. True to form, Native Americans quickly began making these new instruments their own, and many soon became hybridized, yielding new variations that had been unknown in Europe, with corresponding tuning systems, performance techniques and composition ideals. Perhaps the most prominent example is the charango, a small Andean guitar made from the shell of an armadillo, and which had been unknown to both the Europeans and the ancient Incas.
By the same token, the Natives began using new instruments in ways no European ever did, in religious observances, harvest ceremonies or courtship rituals that were specific to the Americas. Instruments such as the harp and the guitar, rather than just playing a melody or a complex polyphonic accompaniment, were often exclusively strummed to provide harmony, or played as rhythm and percussion instruments, to the point where they were sometimes classified as drums. European musical forms were also adapted to Latin American needs and practices, as were new concepts of harmony, particularly the sophisticated system of counterpoint which defined the continent’s classical tradition and influenced its folk and popular styles. Throughout the colonial period, and into the 19th and 20th centuries, much of the Native music patrimony would be influenced by—and in turn greatly modify—European and African music. Five hundred years into the process, the results are as diverse and wide-ranging as any other element of Latin American culture, yielding the amazing array which today constitutes Latin American music.

**European Cultures in America**

For centuries, European conquerors, soldiers, priests, settlers, bureaucrats, farmers and travelers brought with them their world views—their cultures, customs, values, social mores, religions and laws. They also brought with them their music, dances, instruments and poetic forms, with all their social and religious implications, for music was for the Europeans, as it is for any human civilization, an integral part of who they were. Much of their cultural identity was represented by the sounds emanating from the colonial churches and the aristocratic salons, in much the same way that the drums of the African slaves or the huéhuéts of the Native Mexicans were a direct statement of their own existence.

Numerous musical traditions, many of them descended from Spanish medieval folk music and poetry, accompanied the settlers across the ocean and quickly became ensconced in colonial society. These included song forms such as villancicos, romances, guarachas, jácaras, chanzonettas, tonadas and tonadillas. European dances were also prevalent in the Americas, including the pavana, pasacalle, minuete, jota, malagueña, tarantela and seguidilla, as well as some Black-influenced dances such as the cumbée. The origin of other dances remains in question, dances such as the fandango, petenera,
*sarabanda* and *paracumbe*, which seem to have emerged concurrently on both the American and European continents. Whether homegrown or imported, these popular songs and dances nonetheless readily acquired a distinct American flavor, influenced by Native and Black elements. Usually introduced in the salons of the elite, they were quickly adopted by rural people and transformed into folk dances. As we shall see in later chapters, they developed in different ways, with hundreds of local variations, yielding a rich variety of forms and styles.

Yet many of these diverse forms also retain common elements, even five hundred years after their introduction. Thus one can find throughout the continent the traditional dance called *zapateado* (from the Spanish word *zapato*—shoe), derived from the flamenco dancing of Andalusia. With lively rhythms and rapid toe-and-heel work, it is a courtship dance, with the men holding their hands behind their backs and striking the ground forcefully with their heels, while the women make subtle advances by lifting the hems of their long skirts. The *zapateado* can be found in many parts of Latin America, from the Andes to Cuba and Mexico, where the most prominent example is the *jarabe tapatío*. Another shared characteristics is the competitive nature of many Latin American song traditions, found for example in the Colombian *vallenato*, the Venezuelan *gaita*, the Argentine *payada de contrapunto* and the Trinidadian *calypso*. Still another element many of these forms have in common is a particular rhythmic device called the *sesquiáltera* (see sidebar).

**Sidebar: The Latin American Sesquiáltera**

The *sesquiáltera* (also known as *hemiola* in Western art music) is a polyrhythmic technique found throughout Latin America. It is a device which juxtaposes duple and triple meters, and is most often seen when 3/4 and 6/8 rhythms are combined: three groups of two eighth-notes alternate with two groups of three eighth-notes. To fully understand the concept of the *sesquiáltera*, try clapping or singing the following rhythmic patterns:

```
1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 1 2 1 2
>   >   >   >   >   >   >   >   >   >   >
```

```
1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 1 2 1 2
>   >   >   >   >   >   >   >   >   >   >
```
Another way of playing the *sesquiáltera* is:

1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2

One of the most famous examples of *sesquiáltera* occurs in the song “America” from the musical *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim. Bernstein deliberately infused the music with the rhythmic complexity of the *sesquiáltera* to evoke the Puerto-Rican culture that is an important element of the plot.

I like to be in A- me - ri - ca

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 1 2

Okay by me in A- me - ri - ca

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 1 2

When the uneven patterns are played simultaneously by different instruments (rather than sequentially, as in the examples), the resulting syncopations can be thrilling and exhilarating. The *sesquiáltera* is derived from medieval rhythmic practices, and before that from Arabic music that influenced the Spanish Peninsula. Brought over by the Spaniards in their *villancicos* and *tonadas*, today it is widespread throughout the continent, and can be found, for example, in the Mexican *son jarocho*, the Venezuelan *joropo*, the Paraguayan *polca*, the Chilean *cueca*, the Argentine *zamba* and *chacarera*, and in various Andean styles, all of which are examined in later chapters.

**End Sidebar**

The most widespread European poetic forms are the *décima* and the *copla*. *Coplas* (“couplets” or “verses”) typically consist of four lines with either an a b a b or a b c b rhyming scheme. The *décima* is a classical poetic form that emerged in Spain in the 16th century, mostly in the works of the poet and guitarist Vicente Martinez de Espinel, who himself was strongly influenced by medieval Moorish poetry. *Décima* literally means “tenth,” an allusion to the form of the poem: ten lines, divided in five pairs or couplets, with the following rhyme scheme: a b b a a c c d d c. Both *coplas* and *décimas* are octosyllabic—with eight syllables per line. The influence of Spanish songs and the *décima* form are commonplace throughout Latin America, for example in the Cuban
The Emergence of African Culture

The epidemics of the New World posed a problem for the Europeans, who needed a large workforce to build their cities, mine their silver and copper mines, till their fields and work their plantations. They quickly turned to another source of labor found in yet a third continent: Africa. The slave trade had begun with the Portuguese in the middle of the 15th century, and as early as 1505, the first Africans were being imported to Cuba. Within a few decades, Spanish, Dutch and British slave traders joined the Portuguese in shipping their human cargo across the Atlantic. This was the so-called “Middle Passage,” the second in a three-legged journey which brought European manufactured goods to the coast of Africa, where they were exchanged for humans. These were then taken to the Americas and traded for crops such as cotton, sugar, coffee and tobacco, which were then brought back to Europe, completing the cycle. Between 1505 and 1888, the year slavery was finally outlawed on the continent, as many of twenty million slaves were forcibly brought from Africa under the most inhumane conditions. Physical torture and psychological humiliation took their toll on the Africans in the cramped and suffocating cargo bays of the slave ships. An estimated two million did not survive the voyage; those who did were condemned to a life of brutal toil with no hope of returning to their homeland and little prospects of freedom.

Half of the imported slaves went to the Caribbean, another third to Brazil. As a result of this forced migration, most of the American lands today form part of the African Diaspora—the diffusion of African people from their original homeland to other parts of the world. The slaves were captured or bought mostly in West Africa, in what is now Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria, and in Central Africa, in modern Gabon, Congo, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. They seldom spoke the same language, and belonged to various—often enemy—ethnic and cultural groups, including prominently the Ewe, Ashanti, Yoruba and Mandinga. Significantly, they brought with them much of their cultures, religions and musics, all of which in turn influenced to various degrees the cultural development of the new Spanish and Portuguese dominions. Though one can make few broad generalizations about
the myriad African-influenced musical styles found on the continent, some musical traits were often shared by many cultures. Thus, and taking into account any number of exceptions, one can survey the music of the African inhabitants of the New World and note the following characteristics:

- The music tends to have complex rhythms and syncopations, often based on patterns such as the clave, tresillo and cinquillo (examined in later chapters).
- The form of the music tends to be open-ended and in two parts (AB), as opposed to the symmetrical, closure-oriented three-part form (ABA) typical of European music.
- Songs tend to consist of short repeated phrases in call-and-response form, as opposed to long elaborate melodies. Think of the famous lyrics from the Jamaican folk song “Banana Boat Song:”

  **Call:** Hey mister tally-man, tally me bananas.
  **Response:** Daylight come an’ I want go home.

- The drum tends to be the instrument of choice, with some important distinctions:
  - Upright-drum practices, in which the drummer sits in front of a standing drum, are of West-African origin.
  - Horizontal-drum techniques, in which the drummer sits astride a horizontally-laying drum, playing it between his legs, are derived from Central-African practices.
  - The marimba and thumb-piano, both of African origin, are also widespread.
- Most importantly: African inhabitants of the Americas almost invariably adopted European and Native traits, instruments, forms and styles, and combined them with their own. In a word, their music became syncretic.

But Africans faced different challenges in different places. The nature of colonial culture varied throughout the Americas, and was affected by myriad factors such as climate, language, religion, geographical terrain, etc., as well as the complex differences of the various European source cultures. These differences combined with the varied cultural characteristics of the Africans themselves, resulting in musical traditions that were extremely diverse. Mixing African and European cultures did not automatically yield a generic result, as can be attested by the marked
differences between Brazilian *samba*, Cuban *rumba*, Jamaican reggae and Dixieland jazz. Moreover, the African presence was not felt uniformly across the continent. In countries such as Mexico and Peru, disease decimated but did not result in the complete annihilation of Native populations, negating the necessity to bring large numbers of African slaves to these areas. The syncretic dynamic thus worked very differently in these countries, though it was equally pronounced.

**Religious Syncretism**

Syncretism is also evident in the religious devotion that was a key aspect of colonial life, from Mexico to the Caribbean and from Brazil to the Peruvian *Altiplano*. The missionaries realized from the beginning that attempting to completely destroy Native culture would be counterproductive to their efforts at conversion. Instead, a conscious attempt was made to incorporate some elements of the Native worldview into the transplanted European culture, creating a completely new entity. Aware of their susceptibility to ceremony and their propensity for splendor, the missionaries did their best to lure and charm the new converts by making religious celebrations, processions and festivals a source of joy. Every aspect of evangelization was geared towards facilitating the Native’s embracing of Christianity, including lavish ceremonies, expressive rituals, colorful temples, appealing icons, statues, paintings and other objects of devotion. Familiarizing the Natives with the physical characteristics of the new faith would inevitably draw them into its moral and spiritual concepts. Churches and cathedrals were deliberately constructed over the foundations of the destroyed Native temples, in order to make clear in the minds of the Natives that the new religion was to supplant the old. Buildings and altars were impressively ornamented with breathtaking murals, sculptures, flowers and tapestries, and brightly illuminated for masses and services. Continuous use of music in the services was of course one of the main manifestations of this affinity for ceremony. By emphasizing the grandeur of the Christian celebrations, the missionaries attempted to increase the faith of the new converts, and improve the morale of the recently subjugated peoples.

Throughout Latin America, celebrations were held for local patron saints and Catholic feasts, each displaying a distinct emotion. Thus, Christmas would be a time of joy, with loud and colorful celebrations that included intricate crèches and gift offerings, while Easter rituals were
more subdued and solemn, reflecting anguish and penitence, but also hope for salvation. Processions were loud, expensive, lengthy and elaborate, and followed a path that was sumptuously decorated and lined with thousands of men, women and children. Natives carried images of the local patron saint, as well as candles, crucifixes or offerings, while penitents walked for miles on bloody knees. Music, singing and dancing, eating and drinking, fireworks, costumes, decorations, flowers, and even intricate floats all helped to celebrate the Virgin or a particular saint. Ecstatic self-flagellations took place inside the church during Easter, in the midst of large amounts of candles and flowers. These celebrations and processions have continued uninterrupted for centuries, and are still held in many places in Latin America. Religious celebrations also served as community social affairs, to commemorate an important visiting dignitary, or to honor the death of a local leader. They often included supplications to ward off disease or crop-failure, or rituals of thanksgiving.

The Spaniards also introduced dance, drama and pantomime as means of conversion. Traditional Spanish dance-dramas such as Morismas, Matachines and Moros y Cristianos illustrated the medieval battles between Moors and Christians, with the Christians invariably triumphing over the infidel, providing a moral undertone meant to influence the Natives whose religious convictions might be suspect. Assorted Pastorellas, Pasiones, Comedias a lo Divino—stylized representations of the Passion of Christ—were imported from Spain, where they had been popular throughout the Middle Ages, and quickly assumed an American flavor. Other theatrical works such as entremeses, jácaras and mojigangas incorporated elements of Spanish, Native and Black culture. Designed for religious instruction and moral edification, these plays were mostly doctrinal in nature: reenactments of scripture, the life of Christ, the story of John the Baptist or historical events such as the capture of Jerusalem. Titles included The Fall of the First Parents, The Annunciation of the Nativity of Saint John, The Annunciation of our Lady and The Nativity of St. John the Baptist. They were readily accepted by the newly converted Natives who saw in them a lighter side of the otherwise heavy and solemn Catholic rite. Actors, singers and dancers were all Native, and they often spoke and sang in Native tongues. Performances in Spanish invariably included Native words and expressions that delighted the audiences. Musical accompaniment included strumming guitars, flutes and whistles, castanets, drums and maracas. Representations usually involved scenes of mock fighting with wooden swords, masks and
costumes, and there was often much clandestine drinking involved, both by participants and spectators. The tradition of the edifying play continues virtually uninterrupted to this day, and religious ceremonies throughout Latin America are still immersed in splendor that rivals that of their colonial, and indeed of their pre-Columbian, ancestors.

Yet the missionaries’ strategy of supplanting the old religion with the new backfired somewhat, for although the Natives did worship at the new sites and in new ways, the substitution of old temples and ceremonies with new ones provided a measure of spiritual continuity that permitted the banned faith to thrive (albeit covertly) alongside Christian doctrine. The Aztec, Maya and Inca pantheons were similar to those of the Greeks and Romans in that they were open to new beliefs and new deities. They had detailed and complex mythologies that traditionally incorporated the gods of conquered peoples, which were then freely worshiped. It was thus not particularly difficult for them to accept Christ into their religious tradition. Christianity was compatible with their own rites, which were tolerant at their core. More difficult was the missionary’s demand that the Natives worship exclusively at the Christian altar, that they surrender their previous beliefs and customs. For the most part, the Natives were not beholden to the idea of religious exclusivity, of the adoption of one faith at the expense of all others. Though Christianity was often accepted with ease, many Natives were unable or unwilling to abandon the traditions that had guided their families and villages for centuries.

As a result, Native religions endured, at first alongside (but separate from) Christianity, and increasingly in a mixture of interconnected Christian and Native beliefs that adapted to the specific needs of the populace. Native celebrations, feasts and processions were adapted to the Christian faith and held away from the watchful eyes of priests and church officials. Idols would find their way onto altars, hidden under crosses or stashed away in church walls. Often, Native and Christian deities were deliberately merged to facilitate worship. Thus, the Virgin Mary became associated with Tonatzin, the mother of the Aztec gods, and as a result became more readily accepted as The Virgin of Guadalupe. Another example was the Guelaguetza, an ancient Zapotec ceremony of thanksgiving that took place in Oaxaca in July, which was seamlessly transformed into the feast of the Virgin of Mount Carmel, celebrated on July 16th, a tradition that still continues.
Meanwhile, African slaves were developing their own religions, based on communications with the ancestral spirits who dwelled in the African continent. To shield these activities from the disapproving eyes of the plantation owners and church authorities, the ancestral spirits were given Christian identities. For example, the Afro-Cuban *Santería* spirit called Babalú Aye, the father of the world, was closely identified with Saint Lazarus. Over time the two deities—and the two faiths—came to be intermingled and fused together. The adoption of Christianity, ironically, also injected into slave culture a yearning for spiritual liberation that often developed into a form of resistance and, frequently, revolt.

Thus, Christianity melded with Native or African religions (and often both) throughout the Americas, creating new syncretic forms of worship that survive to this day. These belief systems are not a rejection of Christianity. For the most part, their followers are sincere Christians who complement their beliefs with those followed by their forefathers for centuries. Modern church officials have often taken a pragmatic approach to syncretic religions. Priests and missionaries in remote areas—often Natives themselves—casually accept Native elements in church and consider them not dangerous idolatry but rather an opportunity to reinforce the faith of the flock. Nor is there contradiction between the faiths: while Christianity emphasizes salvation and eternal life, Native rites—at least in practice—are often more concerned with fertility, disease and crop failure, as well as social concepts such as love, revenge and community status. A key element of many African rites is communication with an African homeland most practitioners have never seen. In most cases, the rituals provide an important sense of identity.

Perhaps the most widespread example of syncretic celebration on the continent is that of carnival. Spelled *carnival* in English, *carnaval* in Portuguese and Spanish, and *Mardi Gras* in French-speaking countries, it is celebrated in different ways—even on different dates—depending on the country. Most countries on the continent have some kind of carnival celebration, with the most famous ones taking place in Rio de Janeiro, Trinidad and New Orleans. It usually takes place prior to Lent, a final release before the rigors of fasting. The common elements of carnival are exuberant local color, costumes, parades, and music and dancing derived from European, African and Native traditions. In the southern hemisphere’s
warm summer, the carnival season can last throughout the extended period between New Year’s and Lent. The revelry reaches a fever pitch during the five days between the Friday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday.

The syncretic process was not limited to culture, race and religion, but extended to all aspects of life including agricultural practices and food preparation. Africans introduced culinary customs that revolved around bananas and cassava. Europeans introduced grains such as oats, wheat and rice, and livestock such as horses, donkeys, cattle, sheep and pigs. They also brought alien flowers, weeds, vegetables, fruit trees—and rats. Some of the imported crops came to dominate the Americas, particularly sugar and coffee. Europeans also provided technology, for example wagons pulled by beasts of burden, plowshares, and textile techniques. The influence also went in the other direction. Two American crops, corn and potatoes, virtually ended famine in Europe, producing much higher yields than wheat and rice, and growing where those crops would not. Corn could be fed to domesticated animals, and thus revolutionized Europe’s meat and dairy products. Cotton was an invaluable commodity rarely found in Europe, but plentiful in the Americas, as were chilies, tobacco, squash, pineapples, tomatoes, sunflowers, peanuts, turkeys, chocolate, rubber, rare hardwoods and coveted dyes, notably that of the Mexican cochineal. And of course there’s the music, whose syncretic evolution will take up most of the chapters in this textbook.

Modern Native Societies
More than half-a millennium after Columbus first landed in America, Native societies maintain an important cultural—and occasionally political—presence in many Latin American countries. The proportion of indigenous population is naturally greatest in the former Maya, Aztec and Inca lands: Bolivia (55%), Peru (45%), Ecuador (25%), Guatemala (40%) and Mexico (30%). Conversely, other areas saw the virtual eradication of the Native population, so that in many countries, the Native percentage remains in the single digits, and is sometimes less that one percent. Pre-Columbian languages have splintered into various dialects, so that there are dozens of modern versions of Maya, and over forty versions of Quechua. Some studies have identified over 2000 separate languages in Latin America.
Cultural—and musical—consideration of modern Native groups must be undertaken with caution. An important point to remember is that the populations that inhabited the Americas in 1492 usually bear little resemblance to any current inhabitants of the continent, even those, like Mexico’s Lacandones or Venezuela’s Yanomamo, that have remained in relative isolation. As a rule, human societies evolve, and, while the music, customs and religion of these tribes may be unrelated to European or African ones, they also are distinct from those of their ancestors of half-a-millennium earlier.

The dangers faced by Native groups during the colonial period have not always let up in modern times. In every country on the continent, Native groups have been marginalized to various degrees. Forced labor, conscription, exploitation, political pressure to assimilate, and loss of resources and ancestral lands have continued to erode the integrity of traditional societies. Having finally become somewhat resistant to age-old European diseases, many Native groups are increasingly threatened by new ones such as AIDS and dengue fever. Too, the intensified destruction of the rain forest in recent years has seen a precipitous decline in the viability of many indigenous groups.

In the 21st century, modern forces of globalization and modernization continue to conspire against traditional societies, notably by encouraging urban migration of their youth. In many areas, Protestant missionaries have replaced Catholic ones, claiming, like their colonial counterparts, to have the best interest of the Natives in mind, providing them not only with the word of God but also literacy, education and health practices. Most Native communities have to balance their economic development with the threat of acculturation, and the continuous dilemma is often how to achieve a better way of life without sacrificing traditional character. Too often, the arrived-at solutions result in entire Native groups—along with their languages, religions and musical customs—being absorbed into the dominant mestizo or European culture, or altogether disappearing from the American continent.

**Indigenous Music Today**

It is in this context that music has become an important signifier of ethnic identity. In the face of hardship and sometimes even annihilation, a Native group often survives through its music and
other cultural elements which often serve important familial, social and religious functions. Similar traditions can be found across the continent including healing ceremonies, relationships with nature and animals, worship of totems and deities, and contact with—or protection from—the supernatural. Rituals dedicated to the agricultural cycle are also prominent, including the cultivation of corn or cassava, the harvest, and the rainy season, as are rites of passage such as births, courtship rituals, funeral ceremonies, naming ceremonies and war practices. Non-members of Native cultures should be careful in how they judge these rituals and the music that accompany them. In many Native world-views, the present is but one moment in the evolving continuum. From this point of view, there is no such thing as a pure, indigenous style, there never has been and never will be. An Aztec warrior would not identify the music in 1450 as the true “authentic” music, but as an instantaneous snapshot of a continuing process. The music of his modern ancestors is just as valid a snapshot, even if it includes European and African instruments and practices. And while some modern Native musicians have deliberately espoused the “pure and unadulterated” music of their ancestors for political or self-identity purposes, this too is a modern attitude.

In the 21st century, indigenous music is increasingly being recognized as an integral part of Latin American cultures. Important studies by prominent ethnomusicologists are continuously being published, and Native traditions are becoming commercially successful in a global market. Additionally, local and regional festivals and conferences dedicated to Native music have emerged, including prominently the First Indigenous Music Festival of the Americas, held in Mexico City in 2003, the first event to bring together Native musical traditions from all points of the continent.

The countries that have the most prominent Native musical styles are, not surprisingly, the former Maya and Aztec lands (explored in Chapter X) and those of the Inca civilizations (discussed in Chapter Y.) Additionally, however, there are literally thousands of aboriginal groups of different sizes, with millions of individuals inhabiting the continent from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. All these groups have musical traditions that have undergone a wide range of syncretic evolution, to the point where it is often difficult to draw a clear line between purely indigenous music and the (usually) mestizo folk music that gradually evolved from it. Attempting
to explore and describe all of these musical cultures is beyond the scope of this textbook. Instead, a few of the most prominent are explored at logical places.

**Latin America Today**

The American Continent consists of four major areas: North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. North America consists of Canada, the United States and Mexico. The seven countries of Central America are Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize, all of whose inhabitants speak Spanish except for Belize, where English is the predominant language. South America contains twelve independent countries: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay (where the predominant European language is Spanish), Brazil (where Portuguese is spoken), Guyana (formerly British Guyana) and Suriname (formerly Dutch Guyana). Additionally, South America contains French Guiana, still a possession of France. Finally, the Caribbean contains 13 independent countries and about a dozen territories still dependent on France, Britain, the Netherlands and the U.S. Of the 35 countries and dozen territories in the hemisphere, only Bolivia and Paraguay are land-locked.

A question that often surfaces is “What exactly is Latin America?” One traditional definition encompasses those areas in the western hemisphere whose inhabitants predominantly speak Romance languages—those derived from ancient Latin—especially Spanish and Portuguese. Another definition puts it as the entire landmass south of the Rio Grande—the borderlands between the United States and Mexico—plus certain islands of the Caribbean. Yet these definitions, based on commonalities of language and culture, have always been difficult to sustain, and are becoming increasingly so. Problematic are the Guyanas, very much part of the South American continent but separated from their neighbors by history, language and culture. Another problematic issue is that of the Caribbean, with its array of multicultural and multi-lingual islands. But the real obstacle to achieving an accurate definition is the increasing migration of peoples within the continent, as well as from outside the hemisphere. This textbook takes the firm position that Latin America includes the entire western hemisphere, for the days when Latin American culture and society began on the southern shores of the Rio Grande are quickly falling behind us. Indeed, in the 21st century, the entire continent—including the United
States and Canada—is now infused with elements of Latin American music and culture. If the previous definitions are still used for historical and political convenience, the distinctions have little meaning to those interested in studying the region’s music.

The text continues with a discussion of the European-based art music tradition, examining styles from different countries and different eras. We then consider in turn six major geographical areas on the continent, concentrating on the folk and popular music of each: Mexico and Central America, the Caribbean, Brazil, Northern South America, the Andes and finally the Southern Cone. Though the United States has historically been an integral part of the evolution of Latin American music, it does not get its own chapter. Instead, its contributions are examined in conjunction with the evolution of various styles in other countries. Thus, discussion of the emergence of *salsa* in New York and of Tex-Mex in the borderlands appears in the Caribbean and Mexico chapters, respectively.

My intent is not to relate the entire musical life of each country, for that would prohibitively extend the size of this textbook. Rather, I explore the principal local styles and genres, and discuss foreign ones only if they have had a particular impact on the musical development of the country. Moreover, neighboring countries often share similar cultural and musical evolutionary processes, for example the syncretic melding of European, African and Native elements, the development of Carnival traditions, or the influence of rock music on traditional folk styles. I describe these processes in detail at logical places, but then try to limit their full recounting for every culture, region and country, trusting the reader to make the appropriate connections.

Much of the music of Latin America is still unknown and undiscovered, and much of it is in danger of being lost through globalization, modernization, or simply because the people themselves are disappearing or being absorbed into the dominant culture. In isolated towns and villages, from the mountains of Mexico, Peru and Chile to the jungles of Guatemala, Panama and Brazil and to sparsely inhabited Caribbean islands, people are making music that no outsider has ever heard, let alone documented, published or recorded. For every success story such as that of the Garífuna (an Afro-indigenous tribe from Central America whose music has become famous virtually overnight), there are hundreds or perhaps even thousands of other styles and traditions
that are practiced by a few villages, or even a few families. There is work for anthropological and ethnomusicological research for generations. Hopefully, the richness and historical importance of Latin American music that this textbook is attempting to convey will inspire students to undertake such work in years to come.

A Note on the Accompanying CD and the Recommended Listening

The Recommended Listening examples are taken for the most part from commercially available compact discs. In many cases, more than one example is recommended. In this increasingly digital world, it is more and more possible to acquire single tracks rather than entire CDs. There are also several useful compilations that are also commercially available. Of note are the original field recordings of the ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax which have recently been released, and which provide an invaluable insight into many Latin American cultures. Two compilations which nicely complement this textbook are Africa in America: Music from 19 Countries (Corason Records) and Raíces Latinas (Smithsonian Folkways), which together offer examples of more than 50 different styles from all over Latin America. Yet another important source of ancillary materials is the JVC/Smithsonian Folkways Video Anthology of Music and Dance of the Americas, which provides extensive video footage of more than 150 music tradition on the American continent, most of which are covered in this textbook. Finally, the recent explosion of internet-based video examples—notably those found on YouTube.com—has provided an invaluable resource for both students and teachers of Latin American music. Virtually every stylistic example discussed in the text can be illustrated by a video readily available on the internet. However, as of this writing, there is no reliably fixed source for these video examples, and many of them are prone to disappear overnight. I have thus not provided readers with specific internet sources, trusting them to do the appropriate internet searches on their own.