



Congress of Gran Cucuta (1821-1831) *Background Guide*



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Introduction

Letter from the Chair:

Honorable delegates,

On behalf of the dias and committee staff, it is my pleasure to welcome you to EagleMUNC VIII and the Congress of Gran Colombia (1821-1831) Committee! Firstly, we would like to introduce ourselves. My name is Bryant Ho, and I will be your committee chair. I am a sophomore at BC, hailing from the San Francisco Bay Area, majoring in International Studies and minoring in Finance. My co-chair for this committee will be Alexa Kirby. Also a sophomore at BC, Alexa is from Needham, Massachusetts. She is majoring in English and Philosophy.

My MUN journey began during my freshman year of high school. Over the years, I have come to value the numerous opportunities to improve my interpersonal skills and the variety of different viewpoints expressed during a conference. I truly treasure my MUN experiences and hope that I can pass on my passion to the next generation of delegates. However, this committee will be a new experience for both of us: it will be my first time chairing a crisis committee! Though I may not be as experienced in crisis parliamentary procedure as even some delegates, I am confident that we will all have an excellent time together at EagleMUNC VIII.

So prepare yourself: we plan to entertain, immerse, and educate you throughout the weekend, all with the ultimate goal of making this committee the best possible. That being said, it is truly delegate engagement that makes or breaks the committee. From a delegate's perspective, I completely understand how scary it can be

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to raise your placard, but I can personally assure you that each and every contribution helps make this committee more engaging. In the same vein, the dias expects each and every single delegate to have a working knowledge of the subject; it goes without saying that you should have read this background guide in its entirety.

The dias will not insist upon a strict adherence to history; this committee can and will be influenced by your decisions. However, it is strongly recommended that delegates be familiar with Gran Colombia's history, as this knowledge will help you understand and avoid potential blunders that led to the dissolution of the union.

Alexa and I look forward to meeting you all and seeing what each delegate has to offer! In the meantime, please do not hesitate to email either of us should you have any questions or concerns.

Best regards,

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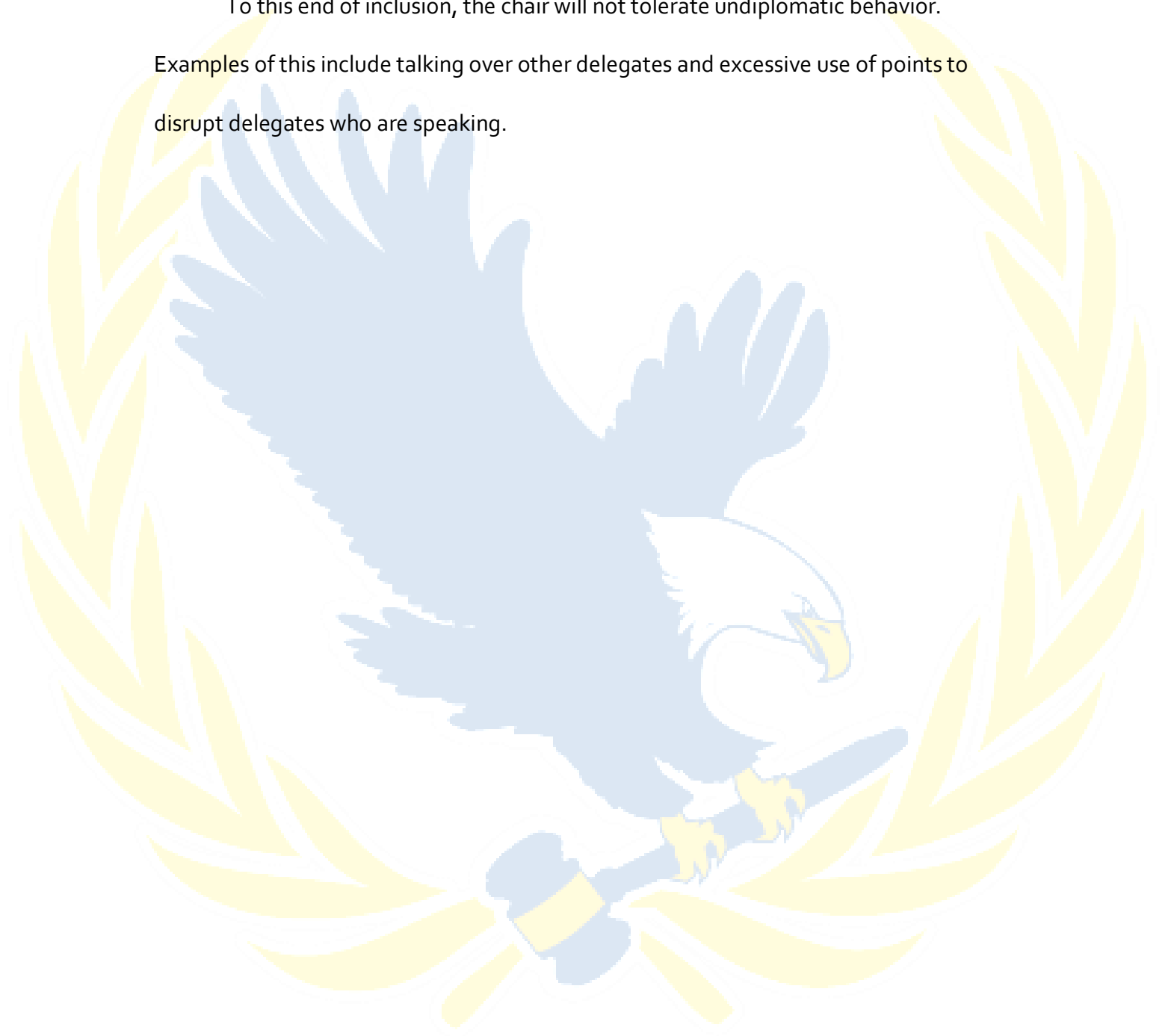
Committee Expectations:

This committee is an inclusive space. Therefore, any forms of discrimination will not be tolerated. Also, please note that this mostly-male committee reflects gender

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roles in early 19th century, not the 21st. The dias remains cognizant of this fact, especially given the underrepresentation of women in MUN.

To this end of inclusion, the chair will not tolerate undiplomatic behavior. Examples of this include talking over other delegates and excessive use of points to disrupt delegates who are speaking.



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Introduction to the Committee:

Committee Start Date

Please keep in mind that this committee starts on August 1st, 1821. This means that Bolívar's conquest of South America is not complete. For example, the option of conquering Ecuador, which was currently underway as of 1821 and was completed in 1822, is still on the table. In addition, it is still possible for delegates to orchestrate a takeover of Peru several years in the future, which would expand Gran Colombia's territory to reflect history. Whilst the dias will not insist upon an exact re-enactment of history, we feel that it would be appropriate for delegates to largely mirror real-life events.

Chair Roles

The chair will play the role of Antonio Nariño, the Presiding Officer of the Congress of Gran Colombia. The co-chair will play the role of Camilo Torres Tenorio, the Vice-Presiding Officer of the Congress. The roles and stances will be apolitical; decisions about the running of the government will be left to delegates.

General Background

During the late 1810s, Spain was losing its grip on its colonies in the Americas. Bolivia, Uruguay, and Paraguay declared independence from the Spanish Crown in 1816.¹ Creoles in Mexico were outraged at Spanish reforms weakening the church and

¹Lockhart. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "The Independence of Latin America"

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military and would eventually rebel in 1820. And Simón Bolívar, the Liberator, was plotting to retake his native Venezuela. Although Spanish colonies as had been in varying levels of revolt for many years, the tide finally began to turn in favor of the revolutionaries. Finally, the Republic of Colombia (henceforth known as Gran Colombia to avoid confusion with the modern Colombian state), encompassing much of the now-defunct Spanish Viceroy of New Granada, was officially created in early 1821. With Venezuela's independence in June of the same year, the fledgling state was quickly gaining power. However, the new nation was constantly plagued by internal strife and power struggles, leading to civil wars and the dissolution of the union in 1831. This committee will begin on August 1st, 1821 with the convening of the Congress of Cúcuta, the first constituent meeting of the Congress of Gran Colombia.² While the earlier Congress of Angostura declared the existence of the state and determined its basic political structure, there is still much to decide. As delegates, this job falls to you. Your task is to both build the country and guide it through the tumultuous 1820s. Will you be able to build a strong Gran Colombia, or will external and internal forces prevail to topple the union?

Historical Background

Before Gran Colombia: The Spanish

In order to better understand the South American political climate during the 1820s, one first needs to retrace history, beginning with the catalysts for the

² Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Buenos Aires"

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independence movements that swept across the continent. In order to provide the fullest context possible, the history begins with the Spanish conquest of South America. In the late 1400s and early 1500s, the economic policy of mercantilism took hold.³ This idea postulated that a country should maximize exports and minimize imports in order to maximize net capital inflow. The best way to do this was to amass colonies, as a country could extract natural resources, like gold and silver, in order to shore up their coffers while gaining a market to sell finished goods from the home country. This desire for gold and silver was the driving reason for the exploration of the Americas. The area that would eventually become Gran Colombia was first conquered by the Spanish conquistadors like Francisco Pizarro. Pizarro systematically dismantled the local Inca population without prejudice. Using central Peru as a base, the Spanish proceeded to send out conquering expeditions north to Colombia as well as south to Chile.⁴ The Colombian expeditions eventually discovered the Chichiban-speaking peoples, who were in the midst of consolidation through warfare and had not yet achieved firm union and political institutions. Thus, they were easily conquered by the Spanish. However, the Chilean expedition fared poorly. Finding neither a civilization to enslave nor plentiful stores of gold to plunder, the Spaniards returned to Peru. Later expeditions established footholds in Chile and eventually consolidated conquered lands, but progress was hindered by the Araucanian Indians, who managed to resist subjugation for a further 330 years!

³ Lockhart. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "History of Latin America"

⁴ Caviedes, César N., John J. Johnston, Marcello A. Carmangani, and Paul W. Drake. "Chile." Encyclopædia Britannica.

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Eventually, Pizarro was assassinated in 1541 and was replaced by a viceroy run from the city of Lima. This marked the start of the Viceroy of Peru, although the constituent lands of Gran Colombia were eventually spun off into their own viceroy, the Viceroy of Gran Colombia, under the Bourbon Reforms in the 1800s.⁵

Initially, the Spanish governed their holdings through a system of *audiencias*, or courts. However, as Spain conquered more and more territory during the 1500s, the *audiencias* were increasingly unable to maintain control and assert royal authority. Thus, the Spanish switched to blocking their territory off into viceroyalties (provinces), each headed by a viceroy (governor).⁶ However, the viceroyalties were merely administrative units, not judicial, so the *audiencias* remained in place, albeit in a diminished role. These men served in a plethora of roles. Firstly, the viceroy acted as a governor; he was expected to maintain the peace, collect taxes and remit payment to the Spanish, and presided over the *audiencia* located in his capital. Secondly, the viceroy was Captain-General, meaning that he was commander-in-chief of all military forces within the viceroyalty. Finally, the viceroy served as a representative of the Spanish king, exercising royal control over the Catholic Church.

This last duty was particularly important. As an extremely prominent and powerful institution, the Church was intimately involved in the colonial economy, and certain orders, like the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), managed to amass substantial wealth through activities like sugar-milling and large-scale agriculture. In fact, the Church used

⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Colombia"

⁶ Smith, "Reviewed Work: The Viceroy of New Spain"

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its capital to insert itself into the economy, becoming a substantial money-lender. In fact, one could easily argue that the Church benefited from and was complicit in the Spaniards' oppressive ruling. For example, many priests emphasized entrepreneurship and extraction of unpaid labor from Amerindians. In this case, these priests used their position to legitimize their position of wealth and power, not for the natives' well-being. On a broader scale, the Church's twisting of Christendom provided justification for the *encomienda* system that essentially enslaved natives. This was allowed on the grounds that encomenderos were simultaneously "Christianizing" natives while also extracting labor from them.

Gran Colombia Socially

The constituent countries of Gran Colombia, much like other Spanish colonies in South America, utilized a strict social hierarchy. Gran Colombia's history and the South America's independence movements are rooted in this caste system, or *Casta*.

The Spanish painstakingly broke down the various ethnicities and birth location of each person, both on their mother and father's sides, to create classifications that tracked every possible mix of ethnicities over several generations.⁷ At the top of the hierarchy were the *Peninsulares* (people of Spanish descent, born in Spain). From highest to lowest, the *Peninsulares* were followed by the *Criollos* (people of Spanish descent, born in the colonies or other white Europeans), *Indios* (people of indigenous descent), *Mestizos* (people of both Amerindian and White descent), *Castizos* (predominant White lineage with some Amerindian), *Cholos* (predominant Amerindian

⁷ "The Cultural Construction of Race and Law: Spanish Colonialism and Castas."

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lineage with some White), *Pardos* (mix of White, African, and Amerindian lineage, *Mulattos* (mixed African and White lineage), *Zambos* (mixed Amerindian and African lineage), and finally *Negros* (African descent).

While one might think that this system's implied class elevation encouraged those of "lower" status to intermarry with those of "higher" status, the opposite is actually true.⁸ Various colonial marriage laws forbade marriages between Spaniards and those of lower classes.

Therefore, the *casta* system actually served as an assurance that the colony would remain subservient to the Spanish. Namely, this system grounded the lower classes in unskilled labor and servitude. This meant that the lower class remained in poverty and were marked as social pariahs.

Catalysts for South American Independence

In the mid-eighteenth century, Spain began the Bourbon Reforms, modeled after Enlightenment-era teachings which called for a unified, efficient government, separation from the Church, and government intervention in the economy.⁹ As Spain became more active in its colonies' affairs, it was alarmed to find that *Peninsulares* had only held the highest positions such as viceroyships. This meant that the locally born Spaniards (*Criollos*) effectively ran the rest of the colony, holding judgeships on *audiencias* and officerships in the Spanish military. To counteract this, *Peninsulares*

⁸ Dashaw. "An Unframeable Icon"

⁹ Lockhart. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "History of Latin America"

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gradually began filling positions in colonial institutions like audiencias and the military at the expense of Criollos. Over time, Criollos increasingly viewed Bourbon direct control as an attack on their political and social capital. This created an “us versus them” mentality; the Criollos and the local population pitted against their Spanish overlords. Ties between Spain and its colonies were further weakened with Napoleon successfully occupying Spain in 1808 and deposed Fernando VII. In Fernando’s place, Napoleon installed his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, on the Spanish Throne. In response, local elites took matters into their own hands, forming juntas and claiming that the absence of a true king allowed them to declare sovereignty. After Napoleon was defeated and the Spanish king again rose to power, Fernando’s policy of continuing to rule Spain as an absolute monarchy irked his subjects and shifted popular opinion towards separation from Spain. Much like other revolutions of the time period, the catalyzing factor for South America was the proliferation of Enlightenment ideas. Criollos adapted this doctrine to express their frustration with their Spanish overlords. In sum, growing resentment by elite who were given an opportunity to fill a power vacuum led to the rise of independence movements.¹⁰

The Independence of New Granada: Simón Bolívar (Colombia and Venezuela)

In 1810, constituent jurisdictions in what is now Colombia took advantage of this power vacuum to systematically overthrow their Spanish overlords, forming the United Provinces of New Granada. However, this new government initially swore fealty to

¹⁰ Lockhart. Encyclopaedia Britannica, “History of Latin America”

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Ferdinand and did not declare independence until 1811, when punitive conduct by European troops removed any possibility of reconciliation. However, these new governments were unstable. This was the result of greed: provincial leaders rushed to gain power, whereas *criollos* attempted to maintain theirs. While the country was occupied by civil wars, Spain took the opportunity to re-conquer the territory, successfully doing so in 1816. Surviving revolutionaries fled and regrouped under Francisco de Paula Santander.¹¹

Meanwhile in present-day Venezuela, a revolutionary movement was also underway. In 1811, a national congress met to draft a constitution and eventually declared the First Republic of Venezuela's independence.¹² Despite not being a delegate, a young soldier by the name of Simón Bolívar threw himself into the debate and eventually joined the new republic's army. Unfortunately, an armistice led to the dissolution of the Republic and Bolívar fled to New Granada. Ultimately, Bolívar successfully led a New Granda-backed invasion of Venezuela, conquering the country in 1813 and proclaiming himself dictator. However, popular support was not on his side: the ordinary Venezuelan was tired of war, so Bolívar's forces were not exactly met with open arms. A brutal civil war inflamed tensions, and in 1814, Bolívar was again defeated by the Spanish. Fleeing yet again to New Granada and then to Jamaica, Bolívar attempted to gain the sympathy of the West (particularly Great Britain) by writing the *La Carta de Jamaica* (The Letter from Jamaica). In what is considered to be his *magnum*

¹¹ Parsons. "Colombia" Encyclopædia Britannica.

¹² McCoy "Venezuela." Encyclopædia Britannica

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opus, Bolívar prophesied the eventual independence of South America and the creation. ¹³

Returning to South America in 1817, Bolívar entrenched himself at the city of Angostura with his army of several thousand foreign soldiers. Furthermore, Bolívar began liaising with José Antonio Páez, a Venezuelan soldier, and the aforementioned forces under Santander. With this formidable force, Bolívar's master plan to attack New Granada would finally come to fruition.¹⁴

This attack was considered to be one of the most daring in military history, comparable to Hannibal's crossing of the Alps. Despite having to cross rivers, march through lakes, and ascend the Andes (a feat the Spanish considered impossible), Bolívar was able to take the Spanish by surprise and defeat them at the Battle of Boyacá. Finally, on August 10th, 1819, Bolívar entered Bogotá; this marked the turning point of the South American independence movements. Two years later, Bolívar defeated the Spanish at the Battle of Carabobo, finally liberating his Venezuelan homeland.¹⁵

¹³ Straussmann Masur. *Bolivar*. Encyclopædia Britannica.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Lockhart. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "History of Latin America"

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Topic 1: Forming a Government

At the commencement of this committee, there are two potential models that one could choose to create a nation. The first is the American model, which is characterized by a federalist-style government and exemplified by the Constitution of the United States. This structure tends to place power in the hands of individual states, resulting in a weak or nonexistent central government. Federalist systems are generally characterized by two traits: a strict constitutional division of powers between the central and regional levels of government, and entrenched regional representation in the central government. Federalist constitutions allocate the most power to large geographically defined units, like states, while also allocating others to smaller units, like counties, or sharing powers between multiple levels of government. In order to ensure that states maintain power of the central government, many, like the US Senate guarantee states equal representation in the upper house of a bicameral legislature.¹⁶

The second is the unitary model, characterized by a strong central government. In a unitary state, the central government delegates authority to sub-national units. France, the classic example of a unitary government, was divided into departments and further subdivided into *arrondissements*. This, local affairs were supervised by appointed officials, while locally elected governments ensured some measure of local representation.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rosenn. *Federalism in the Americas in Comparative Perspective*. University of Miami Law Review.

¹⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica. *Unitary State*.

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There are advantages and disadvantages to each government. Using federalism as our benchmark in this case, there are numerous advantages. For example, federalism provides for easily solutions to common issues, such as raising armies for defense, standardizing a common currency, and implementing trade policy. Furthermore, it works to safeguard against tyranny by preventing the concentration of government power. Finally, it works to overcome differences within the country, allowing for the creation of large, inclusive societies. At the same time, the federalist system has several disadvantages. First, creating large governmental bureaucracies makes implementing reforms difficult. It also creates competition between states for capital, leading to under-regulation. Federalism tends to be unstable, leading to dissolution or the use of military force to prevent dissolution.¹⁸ A system of unitary state may allow for a more organized system of centralized power, but this can lead to government being focused on only some areas of the state and maintaining too much control.

Topic 2: Interactions with the Greater World

As members of the Congress of Gran Colombia, delegates are responsible for more than just domestic affairs, they must also consider the union's foreign affairs. Thus, it is important to be cognizant of the affairs of neighboring powers, especially those in the global West. Furthermore, intentionality regarding 1820s international affairs will help when considering alliances, gaining international recognition, and

¹⁸ Rosenn. *Federalism in the Americas in Comparative Perspective*

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finding trade partners in order to transition Gran Columbia from a primary to a secondary or tertiary economy.

After Spain's stinging defeat in Gran Colombia and the loss of its colonies throughout South America, the country was licking its wounds. Furthermore, Spain paid a huge price for fighting in the Napoleonic Wars: it was economically ruined, deeply divided, and politically unstable. That being said, Spain was looking to reclaim its former glory and was keenly eyeing its former colonies during the 1820s.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the rest of Europe had stabilized following the Napoleonic Wars. Following the Congress of Vienna, where Europe created a lasting peace, countries capitalized on the internal peace to focus on overseas territories.²⁰ In particular, the British were looking to expand their holdings. Having already expanded into the Caribbean sugar colonies of Jamaica and Barbados in the mid 17th-century, the British turned to the South American mainland, successfully conquering and later purchasing the colonies of Demerara and Essequibo from the Dutch. Buying these territories provided the British with a foothold and yet another colony to cultivate sugarcane. However, the British were not yet satiated with a mere foothold in the continent: they wanted to unite as much land as possible under the Union Jack.²¹

¹⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica. Peninsular War.

²⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica. Congress of Vienna.

²¹ Porter. Britain's Empire in 1815

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Topic 3: Across the Atlantic

Meanwhile, the newly formed United States of America was beginning to flex its muscles. Several years after 1821, the current American president, James Monroe, brought forth new foreign policy during his annual address to the American Congress. Having seen the various independence movements across South America, the U.S. decided to prevent Europeans from re-colonizing the area.²² Opting to draw a line in the sand, Monroe drew upon ideas discussed in George Washington's farewell speech: those of disentanglement from European affairs and the defense of American interests. In doing this, Monroe characterized Europe and North America as two separate spheres and claimed that one should not interfere with the other. Monroe promised that America would avoid intervening in European affairs, but will treat further European colonization as detrimental to American interests.²³ Many years later, historians will claim that America instituted this policy in order to eliminate European mercantilism in South America and create a power vacuum that America could easily fill. Eventually, America will become a great power, one that would cite the Monroe Doctrine multiple times to "protect" South American countries from Europe. ²⁴

Topic 4: The Economy of Gran Colombia

It is imperative for the congress to focus on economic development, as the constituent countries' economies leave much to be desired. Given their former status as Spanish colonies, their economies were structured in an extractive fashion and served

²² Office of the Historian. *Monroe Doctrine 1823*.

²³ *Monroe Doctrine*.

²⁴ History.com. Monroe Doctrine.

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to satisfy the needs of the mercantile Spanish. This was not efficient in the slightest: agriculture was the principal economic activity under Spanish rule. Every Spanish subject, from members of indigenous villages to the large estates of the wealthy, farmed. That being said, the economy varied slightly post-colonization: wheat was introduced and cattle were raised.²⁵

The Viceroy of New Granada had one principal sector: mining. While it is possible that other goods, like sugarcane, could have been grown in New Granada, producers could not compete with the more established Cubans. Despite its status as the economic backbone of New Granada, mining employed a disproportionately small percentage of the population. The prohibitive cost of transport from inland areas to the coast meant that this was the sole export worth extracting. Eventually, gold deposits ran dry, and miners shifted to the next precious metal: silver. Recognizing the industry's value, the Spanish crown levied substantial taxes on the mining industry, and the silver tax even became the Spaniards' principal revenue stream. This has led to profound effects due to the use of mercury to refine silver, leading to pollution that has continued to affect the constituent countries of Gran Colombia in the modern day.²⁶

That being said, the colonies' economies were actually modernizing before Latin American independence. They utilized the putting-out system, creating a local cottage industry where employers contracted out various production stages to local households. This identical system was used in Europe and was the precursor to the

²⁵ Kittleson. *History of Latin America - Indians among Spaniards*.

²⁶ Ibid.

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Industrial Revolution. And the colonies' mineral riches brought the upper classes of New Granada luxuries from Spain: finished textiles, wine, and oil. Aside from this mild industrialization, the economy remained largely primary and continued to rely on extracting materials from the Earth. While there are various theories as to why this happened, one that has been gaining prominence is that colonizers set up extractive institutions that were designed to remove anything of value from a colonized country, preventing any retained earnings from being plowed back into the country's economy. This has been a recurring problem that has continued to the present-day and is one that will stunt Gran Colombia's development if the crisis is not resolved.²⁷

Topic 5: Peru-Gran Colombia War

The Peru-Gran Colombia war was started due to territorial claims. When territory was transferred from the Viceroy of Peru to form the Viceroy of New Granda, borders were not clearly demarcated due to a lack of geographical knowledge and lack of importance associated with the generally unpopulated area. Seeing an opportunity to seize Bolivia in 1828, the Peruvians expelled the Colombian army from the territory. Furious, Bolívar declared war on Peru. After many bloody land and sea battles, the war ended in a virtual stalemate, and both sides recognized the borders as those of the corresponding Viceroyalties pre-independence. Later on, a formal armistice ceded various territories, but it was too late for Gran Colombia. This war was one of the main catalysts leading to the breakup of Gran Colombia, ending with its dissolution.²⁸

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *Gran Colombia–Peru War*. Wikipedia.

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Topic 6: The End of Gran Colombia

As previously mentioned, the union that would eventually become Gran Colombia arose from the majority of the former Viceroy of New Granada. This consists of the modern-day countries of Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, as well as parts of Peru, Guyana, and Brazil. Given that Gran Colombia was made up of many different countries, all with their own economic and social system, this led to fierce rivalries and regionalism that eventually led to the breakup of the union. This can be exemplified today with each ex-constituent country having its own language and customs. One of the primary tasks, as delegates of the Congress of Gran Colombia, will be to combat this regionalism in order to keep the union together. This was caused by several factors, especially raging debate over the government's power. This knowledge will be crucial to prevent the problems which led to the dissolution of Gran Colombia.²⁹

Bolívar was the chief advocate of the centralist belief, while Santander firmly believed in the federalism. The federalists, seeking to model the country after the United States, stressed the importance of laws and institutions. However, Bolivar envisioned that a country ruled with an iron fist would do a better job of stamping out lawlessness. Riding the populist wave and his reputation as "the Liberator", Bolivar, and his ideas, triumphed over Santander, and he was elected President of Gran Colombia. But he soon left to conquer Peru, leaving Santander to govern in his stead. Without the

²⁹ Tomaselli. *Simón Bolívar Made Exactly the Same Mistakes Maduro Is Making*. Ozy.

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unifying Bolívar to smooth over disagreements, the new government began to weaken, eventually leading to civil war and the dissolution of Gran Colombia.³⁰



³⁰ *Elections and Events 1810-1849*. The Library UC San Diego

Questions to Consider

1. What role, and how much influence should the Church play in Gran Colombia?
2. How should social classes be demarcated?
3. What type of government should be formed? Federalist or centralist? How should various groups be represented in government?
4. How should Gran Colombia interact with other countries? Should the union adopt an aggressive foreign policy? An isolationist one? Should Gran Colombia get involved in and seek to profit from other countries' conflicts? How should Gran Colombia deal with the rising power of America?
5. How should Gran Colombia diversify and/or advance its economy? How should development take place? Does equality matter? How will Gran Colombia mitigate environmental problems resulting from economic development?
6. Should Gran Colombia go to war with Peru?
7. How can the federalist and centralist debate be resolved? How can the committee work to prevent the dissolution of Gran Colombia?

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