War and Nation Building in Latin America: Crash Course World History 225

Crash Course: World History
https://youtube.com/watch?v=v6xi8_7Fy6Y
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/v6xi8_7Fy6Y

Hi, I'm John Green. This is Crash Course World History, and today we're gonna return to two of our favorite themes: the creation of nation-states and the role of war. And we're gonna focus on a region that often gets overlooked in world history, Latin America. Me from the Past: Wait, Mr. Green, Mr. Green--there's another America? Where they speak Latin? Well, yes and no, Me from the Past. In fact, the United States is not America. This is America. And no, people in Latin America do not speak Latin. We call it Latin America because, you know, European hegemony in naming things. [Intro] So I know this will lead me to being accused of Eurocentrism, but if we're going to talk about nation-states in Latin America, we do have to begin in Europe. Specifically, I want to talk about a controversial theory about how nation-states emerge, coming from a book called Coercion, Capital, and European States, by Charles Tilly. It's a pretty dense book, but the basic theory is that some European states were able to transform themselves into what Tilly calls "national states" between the 16th and 20th centuries, because their rulers were able to develop the coercive institutions--you know, like police and especially the army--that protected their populations from outsiders. And also to protect from internal revolutions. So you have the army, that keeps you safe from outside threats, and then the police, keeping you safe from inside threats. At the same time, these national states developed the economic institutions to extract revenue to pay for this coercion, which allowed the state to flourish. So the state needs revenue to make its army and police work, and the key to that, of course, is war. Or, at least, the threat of war. But for this cycle that we've talked about in the past to work, it has to be a specific kind of war, right? It has to be an international war, a war against a different foreign power. Because civil wars are not good for the economy, and also obviously bad for like, the institutions of the state. Okay, let's go to the Thought Bubble. So Tilly starts with the highly debatable proposition that war creates states, which then fight wars, which further enhance the power of states. For the most part, European wars were over control of territory, right? With the state either trying to extend its territory, or prevent its neighbors from extending theirs. To expand your territory, or defend against someone else's expansion, rulers needed armies. And this became the state's first large-scale organization. Armies required additional organizations, especially ones that collected taxes, so states with large armies tended to bureaucratize. According to this theory, wars also helped in the transition to more direct rule by the state. Before 1750, most European states relied on intermediaries, like local clergy and landlords, to do what governments do. But these intermediaries could get in the way, so the rulers started bypassing them and instituting more direct forms of rule. But direct rule was intrusive in citizens' lives, especially when they were required to serve in the army or pay taxes to support the army. Now, forced conscription into the army is generally unpopular, but it does allow citizens to have some leverage over the state--because, you know, then they make up the army. Citizen soldiers and citizen taxpayers can use this leverage to extract concessions from the state, usually in the form of greater political participation, which has been a hallmark of classical European liberal democracy. Now of course, this is all highly theoretical, but as a model for state formation, it's also somewhat elegant. And more importantly, because it applies to Europe, and particularly to post-industrial Europe, Eurocentric versions of history will often hold this theory up as one of the reasons for Europe's success in world history. Especially compared to other regions like, say, Latin America. Thanks, Thought Bubble. So, there's this persistent stereotype of Latin American states, that for most their history, most of them have been ruled by military strongmen who use their armies to create strong states that oppressed the people. And like many of the stereotypical historical narratives we've seen, there's some truth to that picture. But Latin America encompasses a lot of states and has been around for a long time, so generalizations aren't going to apply equally to all places at all times. Like, in general, generalizations just don't work that well. And while there is a lot of shared history and culture in Mexico and Central America and South America, it's worth remembering that Venezuela is as far away from Uruguay as Mali is from Romania. So anyway, we've got this stereotype of the strong man ruling these strong Latin American states, but it's not that simple. In his book Blood and Debt: War and the Nation State in Latin America, historian Miguel Angel Centeno posits that while Latin American has had more than its share of military regimes, this is a reflection of the weakness of the state. And then goes on to argue that this may be the result of the absence of international wars in Central and South America. I mean, yes, there have been wars between Latin American states, but they've been surprisingly brief, and, compared with 20th century European wars, not particularly destructive. Part of the reason for that, is that while Latin American countries have frequently been ruled by military leaders, they often lack the capacity to raise large numbers of troops and the taxes to pay for them. And thus their armies can't fight long, drawn-out wars. Another reason is geography. Latin America's huge and geographically diverse, but the borders of many of its countries tend to be inhospitable for settlement. And without a lot of people living on the frontiers, there's less opportunity and less reason for conflict. It's the same reason the U.S. hasn't gotten in a war with Canada for like, a hundred seventy years. There's just nothing up there. No offense, Canada. Well, some offense. What do you have that we need, trees? Snow? Hockey? We've got hockey in Dallas. Also, in general, Centeno argues that Latin American nation states tend to see themselves as sister republics, as he wrote, "The continent is seen as a larger community over and above the nation state." But, Latin America has seen a lot of civil wars in the last two hundred years, and this is the crucial distinction; when Latin American states mobilize their military, it's usually against their own citizens. As Centeno puts it, "the enemy of 'La Patria' was perceived not as the nation next door, but as those in the population who threatened the social and economic status quo." Often, these enemies have been indigenous people, or especially during the Cold War, communists, and other leftists. So, that's one way of thinking about Latin American states and comparing them to European states. You know, maybe relative international peace in Central and South America has contributed to the states of Latin America being less successful economically and politically than those in Europe. But, as usual in World History, and also everything else, the truth resists simplicity. So, according to Tilly's theory, "Wars can be beneficial because they provide the potential to create states, but that process doesn't really work unless there's some institutional foundation to build on," and most of the countries in Latin America didn't have that, partly because colonization was designed to make sure that people couldn't put those institutions into place in their homelands. And partly because the wars for independence were so destructive to the region. Then, the small-scale wars in Latin America after independence didn't require states to build up their tax collection apparatus, or the accompanying financial structures. Because one, they had a steady source of revenue, in the form of taxes on the exported commodities. And secondly, like, if you're just gonna have little wars, you can pay for them with loans from Britain, or the United States, which are happy to help, and all they ask in exchange is that the CIA be allowed to run your country. And also that multi-national corporations be allowed to extract all of your resources and keep the profits. So, because these loans and taxes on trade were available to these states, they didn't have to tax their populations. Now, that may seem like a good thing, but taxes, and yes, I know that I'm a huge fan of taxes; I'm biased toward taxes, TAXES are good. Without taxes on individuals, the state didn't have to bargain with its citizens and develop the important bonds between the government and the population that we find in stronger states. Like, when a government needs money from its people to function, it kind of has to listen to them. And then there's the oft cited fact that wars are really good for fostering nationalism, and nationalism can, in fact, help build a state as it did in 19th century Germany, which everyone agrees was a great development. Anyway, without a lot

of international wars and especially without a sense of a threatening enemy, the nation-states of Latin America just aren't as nationalist as their European counterparts. Well, I don't know about that, actually, have you seen Brazil play Argentina at The World Cup? Okay, now I wanna turn to another challenge for would-be nationalists in Latin America: Latin America's legacy of racial and class division. Viewers of the first Crash Course World History series will remember that Latin American society was divided into a pretty rigid hierarchy, with Spanish-born peninsulares at the top, indigenous people and slaves at the bottom, and Creoles and mestizos in the middle. When Latin American countries achieved independence, these divisions became a source of anxiety for the new ruling class of Creoles; class and racial distinctions were intertwined, but in general, the ruling class was afraid of losing too much of its power to the lower classes. One finds in world history very few examples when the ruling class is, like, totally psyched to give its power over to the lower classes, but these race and class divisions also prevented the armed forces from bringing people together. Like, in many countries, the army was one of the first places where people from different regions and of different social classes would mingle together. And despite diverse backgrounds, they would start to feel like citizens of the same nation, fighting for a common cause. But Latin American armies were small, and the social and economic hierarchy between the officers and the enlisted rank were even more pronounced than they were in, say, the United States or in European countries. Another reason for the relative lack of state nationalism in Latin America is the absence of an external enemy, like, if you look at European nationalism, one of the common features is a clearly identifiable other, used to build up nationalist feelings and a sense of common identity. Like, Creoles in one Latin American country likely saw themselves as different from their own indigenous populations, but not so different from the Creole elites in neighboring nations. As Miguel Centeno put it, in Latin America, "The gulf between white, black, and Indian within countries was always greater than the differences between any of these groups across borders." So to me, all of this suggests that the connection between war and building a national state is not as simple as Tilly suggests, and maybe there's something else to learn here as well. In comparison with strong European states, like the UK or France or Germany, Latin American countries like Argentina and Peru and Mexico can often appear unstable and violent, like they're failing to provide the main thing that a successful state gives its citizens: safety. But those European states are also a lot richer, and a big part of the reason that they are a lot richer is colonialism. One of the central advantages that European states have over Latin American states is that European states were able to begin their lives by extracting lots and lots of value from Latin America, whereas most Latin American states had to begin their existence with extremely destructive wars for independence. So because after the 19th century, most of the European states became more concerned with providing for the welfare of their citizens than using their security forces against those citizens, and because these states have achieved undeniable economic success along with internal peace, there's a tendency in historical literature to hold them up as the greatest possible example of the nation-state. And I wanna be clear that many states in Europe have been really successful. People tend to live long lives; crime rates are relatively low; people report feeling safer and happier, but the conditions in which European nation-states arose were specific to the region and to the time, and it's a bad idea to try to universalize them as a model for the rest of the world. I mean, thinking about Latin America, where most of the independent nation-states are older than either Italy or Germany should remind us that, as Miguel Centeno puts it, "The process that occurred most successfully in northwestern Europe beginning in the 16th century and culminating in the 19th was the true exception." And I think it's also worth noting the tremendous growth in many Latin American countries in the past couple decades, which reminds us that when it comes to history and picking winners and losers, we should remember that we are not at the end of history, --we're in the middle of it. Thanks for watching. I'll see you next week. Crash Course is filmed here in the Chad and Stacey Emigholz Studio in Indianapolis; it's made with the help of all of these nice people, and it exists because of your support at Subbable.com. Subbable is a voluntary subscription service that allows you to support Crash Course directly, so we can keep it free for everyone forever, also you can get great perks. So I wanna thank all of our Subbable subscribers. I also wanna thank you for watching, especially thanks to the educators who share these videos with your students, and as we say in my hometown, don't forget to be awesome.