



Eleonora Escalante Strategy presents the last season of

*Central America:
A Quest for the Progression of
Economic Value.
Season IV.*

The origin of Central America political-economy.

Period of study: From 1700 to 1900

Episode 11

**The Indigo Courage
in Central America**

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Central America: A Quest for the Progression of Economic Value. Season IV

From 1700-1900: The origin of Central America political-economy.



Outline Calendar

Season IV goes from 19 September to 31 December 2025

<p>19-Sept-2025</p> <p>Episode 1 ✓</p> <p>Mexican Influence in Central America</p> 	<p>26-Sept-2025</p> <p>Episode 2 ✓</p> <p>Derailment of violence and inner conflicts between Spaniards and Indians</p> 	<p>3 and 10-Oct-2025</p> <p>Episode 3 & 4 ✓</p> <p>Independence Bells (1800-1823) Part I Independence Bells Part II</p> 	<p>17-Oct-2025</p> <p>Episode 5 ✓</p> <p>United Provinces of Central America (1823-1840)</p> 	<p>24-Oct-2025</p> <p>Episode 6 ✓</p> <p>A voyage after the Republics Separation (1840-1870)</p> 
<p>31-Oct-2025</p> <p>Episode 7 ✓</p> <p>Philosophical Foundations of Agricultural Liberalism 1870-1900</p> 	<p>7-Nov-2025</p> <p>Episode 8 ✓</p> <p>When there is no precious metals?. Agricultural commodities in Central America</p> 	<p>14-Nov-2025</p> <p>Episode 9 ✓</p> <p>The consolidation of the Hacienda Model in Spanish America</p> 	<p>21-Nov-2025</p> <p>Episode 10 ✓</p> <p>The Golden Bean of Coffee in Central America</p> 	<p>28-Nov-2025</p> <p>Episode 11 ✓</p> <p>The Indigo Courage in Central America.</p> 
<p>5-Dec-2025</p> <p>Episode 12</p> <p>The Cacao Industry in Central America.</p> 	<p>12-Dec-2025</p> <p>Episode 13</p> <p>Sugar Industry in Central America</p> 	<p>19-Dec-2025</p> <p>Episode 14</p> <p>Livestock and other agricultural subsistence products</p> 	<p>26-Dec-2025</p> <p>Episode 15</p> <p>Bananas joining the Plateau of Central America 19th century</p> 	<p>31-Dec-2025</p> <p>Episode 16</p> <p>Summary and Conclusions Industrial Factory Development in CA: It was Never a priority</p> 

28/11/2025



Central America: A Quest for the Progression of Economic Value. Season IV

A piece of the economic puzzle of Spanish Central America in Four Seasons



Big Picture of our Content.

Season IV as of 19th of September 2025.

Season	Start Date	Finish Date	Number of episodes	Historical Timeline to Analyze	Main General themes
One (I) Autumn -Winter 2024	October 4 th , 2024	December 27 th , 2024	13 episodes	1492-1558	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historical foundations Castile & Aragon: Discovery of Spanish America, the Holy Roman Empire Charles V Holy Roman Emperor: his local, personal, regional, religious, and international agenda The Spanish Inquisition
Two (II) Winter-Spring 2025	January 24 th , 2025	May 2 nd , 2025	13 episodes	1492-1700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spanish America with a Medieval Allure: Conquest and Colonization Understanding the economics philosophy of the Habsburgs Rulers in Central America: Philip II, Philip III, Philip IV, and Charles II. Commodities: Mining extraction of precious metal reserves
Three (III) Spring-Summer 2025	May 23 rd , 2025	August 29 th , 2025	14 episodes	1700-1900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School of Salamanca The Bourbon era begins. From Philip V (1683-1746) to Alfonso XIII (1886-1941) The War of Spanish Succession The Jesuit Suppression and Restoration (1773-1814) The meaning of the French Revolution in Spanish America The Why of Napoleon Bonaparte
Four (IV) Autumn-Winter 2025	September 19 th , 2025	December 31 st , 2025	15 episodes	1700-1900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence Bells of Central America (1800-23) United Provinces of Central America (1823-40) Derailment of violence and inner conflicts Charted Urban vs Forgotten Rural Mining + Agricultural Commodities. Never an Industrial Factory Development. Main agriculture production industries: Cacao, Indigo, coffee, sugar, livestock, bananas. What´s next?

AEIOU Austrian Habsburg Dominance of the World

Catholic Social Order

Spanish Colonization in America

Deep Inequality

Inbreeding Class

The Crown Ruler (Habsburg-Trastámara-Avis)

Spanish America a New Land under a new political administration

Upper Class Settlers

Vassals to the Crown

Catholic Social Order

Eleonora Escalante Strategy. El Salvador

1. *From Invasion to Transformation and Formation of the land for Indigo.*
2. *How did indigo plantations begin in the kingdom of Guatemala*
3. *Indigo 101.*
4. *Indigo production and trade from 1770 to 1830*



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From 1700-1900: The origin of Central America political-economy.

The Indigo Courage in Central America

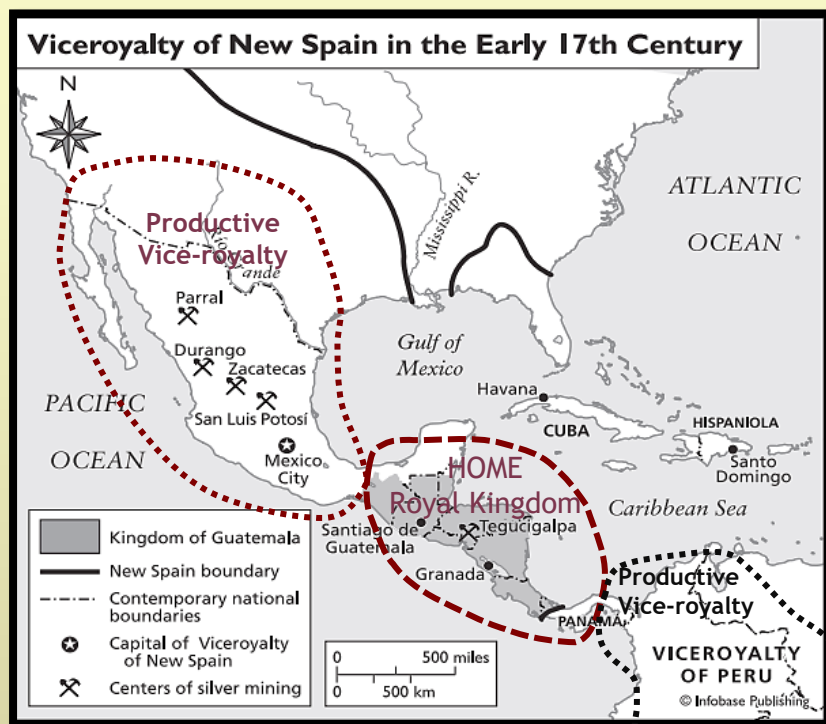
From Invasion to Transformation to the Formation of the land for Indigo.

Land use of the Kingdom of Guatemala

The Royal household of the Kingdom of Guatemala was a composite network of provinces under the supervision of the Catholic Church.

Europe was not home for these royals. The Kingdom of Guatemala was their new home.

Only when we understand that the kingdom of Guatemala was the main royal household for a dynasty, our eyes can see the truth of the region, and why it was strategically administrated as such between 1523 to 1821.



One

First of all: we must stop to see the colonial economic path of Spanish America as extractive towards Europe. The reality is that colonial villages were looking for exports to create income, they sent part of the production to Cadiz-Sevilla, but most of it was sold to Britain and the smugglers of the Caribbean. In consequence, there were certain limited profits coming from exports for the "Royal dwellers and staff of the kingdom of Guatemala and their provinces" before the independence.

Two

Second: if we focus our attention to the Central American Region built as a complex household of different provinces, then, the role of the Viceroyalties was also clear: those were centers of production of precious metals. Geographically, these productive centers attracted the massive number of Spanish Immigrants and built urban cities. The core strategic guideline of Colonial Central America was to protect the land as a dynasty territory, not as a productive region.

Three

Third: Only a selected group of Iberians came to populate the Kingdom of Guatemala. These were the staff of the royal dwellers (including the military orders at the service of the royal family), and the staff was allowed to look for products beyond the foodstuff of subsistence, because they were in need to import certain European goods for their local life-style.

Four

Fourth: The process of conversion of the land of the Kingdom of Guatemala's land was very delicate to do not touch the lands of the Indigenous populations until the arrival of the Bourbons. That was the game changer. Indigo was a suitable existing plant found by the Spanish Conquistadores. But the selection of it was not automatic. It took them several loops of trial and error.

Between 1523 to 1700 the royal house of the Spanish Habsburg Branch shifted from Iberia to the Kingdom of Guatemala. However, we perceive that their itinerant court style kept them moving through different location households depending on the natural disasters or conflictive circumstances with the native Indians. When the Bourbons arrived, they tried to dismantle the political organization of the Habsburg Valois/Castile-Aragón dynasty descendants in Central America.

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The Indigo Courage in Central America

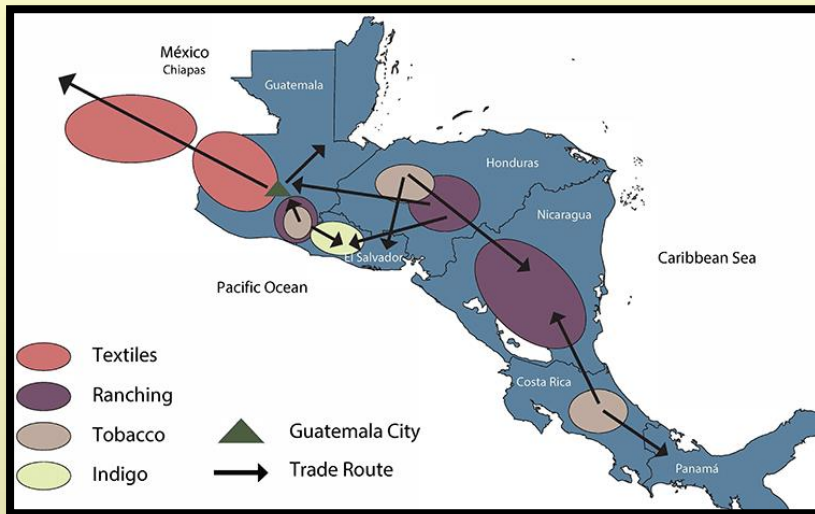
From Invasion to Transformation to the Formation of the land for Indigo.

Land use of the Kingdom of Guatemala



The Royal household of the Kingdom of Guatemala sent to Europe: dyewoods, rubber, indigo, cochineal, cacao, silver, lead, gold, and later sugar and coffee. The smugglers of Britain took some part, and the rest went to Cadiz.

Only when we understand that the kingdom of Guatemala was the main royal household for a dynasty, our eyes can see the truth of the region, and why it was strategically administrated as such between 1523 to 1821.



Map Source:
Taracena Arriola, Luis Pedro. "The Federal Republic of Central America, 1824-1840."
Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History. 26 Mar. 2019;
<https://oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-622?>

Invasion

AGROPASTORALISM:

The invasion of the White Spanish, called to the Pre-hispanic lands was accompanied with their core species. The Spaniards (and the catholic orders) installed the model of classic agropastoralism of the Mediterranean sea nations. The eating identity of the Spanish was in the consumption of wheat, other European cereals, olive oil and wine and livestock. The knowledge of land cropping of the Europeans was different than the Indigenous. The Spanish subsistence in the new invaded lands depended on how quickly they could develop skills in a new climate, soils, vegetation and hydrological regimes. In consequence, this phase priority was to produce for self subsistence, using the existing plants of the Native Indians and adapting their own crops to it.

Transformation

TRANSFORMATION OF THE INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPE:

The process of transformation of the land according to the needs and wants of the Spanish-Criollos and the Catholic Monastic Proprietors began in the Pacific Highlands. A syncretism between the indigenous species of plants, Spanish herd animals, created a new land management system according to the type of economy (Indian, Church or Spaniard) based on the Haciendas, Cofradías and Communal Lands (ejidos and municipal).

There were at least three type of haciendas:

1. Grain haciendas
2. Mixed haciendas
3. Livestock, Cattle or mules' haciendas.

Eleonora Escalante Strategy has identified a triple colonial economic model integrated in between by the Catholic Church colonial economy.

Formation

FORMATION OF AN EXPORTS SYSTEM:

The Spanish colonial economic system imposed itself as the winner model through indigo. Why? with the control of decision making, finance and consolidation of lands, it was during the 18th century that the Spaniards dominated trade and access to international markets. Pandemics and labor recruitment over the Indian populations dismantled the Native land management, which only occurred when the liberals seized the Catholic and Native properties. However, INDIGO main relevant production boom occurred before the Independence, right after the Jesuits expulsion, between 1770 to 1830; while El Salvador continued its production and distribution longer.

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The Indigo Courage in Central America

How did Indigo plantations start in Guatemala?

Indigo cultivation altered the land use of the Kingdom of Guatemala for the first time in history.

The importance of Indigo in the formation process of the Kingdom of Guatemala exports system changed the land use of the region. During the 18th century, the mercantilism was in full apogee all over the world, and the demand for Natural Dyes was crucial in the Textiles Global Industry.

How did Indigo win the spotlight in Central America?



Before 1523

Indigo was a valuable pigment in pre-colonial Mesoamerica, known as Chóh among the Mayas, and known as Xihliquitl in Aztec-Nahuatl.

It was used on textiles, murals, hair, and employed for medicine as diuretic, epilepsy and abscesses. (Before 1523)



1560s

Pedro de Ledesma (a Spanish conqueror and bureaucrat) searches Martín Cortés y Ramírez de Arellano. Marquez Oaxaca valley, son of Hernando Cortes to cultivate Indigo. Ledesma obtained the monopoly of Indigo Dye in New Spain from the King for ten years. (1563-1573)

<https://coronado.unm.edu/node/8803>



1600s

The local Indigofera Suffruticosa welcomed the entrance of Indigofera Tinctoria from Asia, as it is introduced to New Spain and Central America. (From 1573 to 1610) The royal Crown issued the restriction of Indigenous labor in Indigo for 150 years. Labor shifted to contraband African slaves.



1620s

The Royal Obraje for Imperial Indigo: The standard for production was set in 1610, when the Royal Crown delivered its own instructions for the cultivation and manufacture of Imperial Añil. The industry potential was limited by labor source. By first quarter of 17th century, the use of African slaves was requested to the King of Spain. First boom of trade from Central America to Spain. European protectionist regulations and restrictions against imports of Guatemala indigo followed. (Between 1590-1620)

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Known Indigofera plant species origins include:

1. South and Southeast Asia: Indigofera Tinctoria
2. China: Indigofera Coccinia, I. Decora, I. tinctoria and I. amblyantha
3. South Carolina USA: Indigo Carolinians, and I. Lespotsepala
4. Central America: Indigo suffruticosa and Indigofera guatemalensis (añil).

- Before 1492, European Textile Merchants imported Indigo directly from producers or traders from India, Armenia, Persia, Levant Region, mainly through the Italian-Venetian Merchants who monopolized its distribution to Europe.
- Indigo Blue-Dye was among one of the most valuable raw materials employed in the textile industry and other articles, included pigments for art.
- Indigo accessed Medieval Europe in limited quantities because it was a luxurious item with ultimate-colored textiles clients from the royal families and nobility.
- The long route expensive pricing of Indigo from South Asia-China to Europe, by way of Islamic Iberia through Genoese-Venetian merchants, forced Europeans to rely in Mediterranean woad (isatis tinctoria) as its principal source of blue.
- When the Portuguese, later Dutch and British traders reached India, indigo began to be imported in larger quantities to Europe and eclipsed the woad market by mid 16th century.



Woad (Isatis Tinctoria)



Indigo (Indigofera Tinctoria)



Indigo (Indigofera Suffruticosa)

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The Indigo Courage in Central America

How did Indigo Plantations start in Guatemala.

Indigo cultivation altered the land use of the Kingdom of Guatemala for the first time in history.

After so many difficulties to open new markets for Guatemala-Indigo, a period of global decline supply for the indigo trade occurred: A plague of Locusts devastated Central America Crops, exports from India fell by political altercations, European prohibitions, etc. Nevertheless, Indigo remained a stagnant production in the region until the arrival of Charles III Bourbon Farnese to the Spanish Crown.

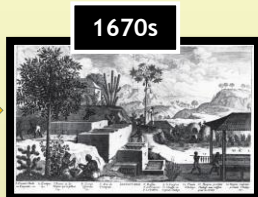


The demand for Guatemala-El Salvador indigo occurred only for a short period of time (between 1770 to 1830). It coincides with the period of the American Revolutionary War (1775–83) and the parallel effort of Britain to develop massive indigo planting in Bengal, through the British East India Company.

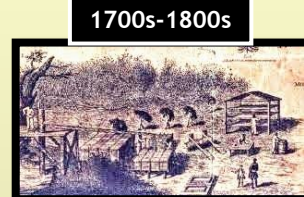
How did Indigo win the spotlight in Central America?



Consumption Expansion: Indigo obras extended into Ecuador and Venezuela. Most of cheap woolen textiles in South America were dyed blue. Merchants of Madrid commercialized with the New World Indigo to dye silk consumed at the royal Court bureaucrat's level. (17th century)



Indigo production expanded to the French Santo Domingo (Haiti), using African labor force. This was the only good quality true competition to Guatemala Indigo. By the beginning of 1700s, in Haiti, 200 indigo farms output of 2 million pounds compared with 1 million pounds of Guatemala Kingdom.



The jiquilite or añil continued to be exported from Guatemala, but the industry faced a forceful trouble: Indigenous labor was prohibited by law, and the Central America añileros were restricted by it. The Bourbon Reforms changed this: Charles III Bourbon removed the prohibitions of the use of Indigenous labor, and indigo production was activated, experiencing a new boom between 1770 to 1830. European demand for printed cottons rose, causing a lot of suffering to the Indian population. We will explore the situation of Indigo trade from the Kingdom of Guatemala to the world in the following slides. The Central America Indigo Industry was reduced by 1830s in Guatemala, but El Salvador continued to produce and export it until the liberals replaced it with coffee by the end of the 19th century.

It is estimated that around 24,000 African slaves were introduced into Central America in the 18th-19th centuries for Indigo's labor force and luxury domestic workers. The indigo produced in Central America supplied for a short time (between 1770s-1830s) the demand of the "high quality" segment. As of the 19th century, Bengal Indigo became the market leader against the Guatemala-Salvadoran Indigo. It was cheap for the VOC and EIC to trade it with Indian Bengal Indigo prices, and the Guatemalan-Salvadoran industry declined.



Mayan Blue. The Mayan woman is concentrating weaving a tablecloth with her waist loom in San Antonio Palopó Guatemala. Source: https://es.123rf.com/photo_132489240_la-mujer-maya-se-concentra-tejiendo-un-mantel-con-su-telar-de-cintura-en-san-antonio-palop%C3%B3-guatemala.html

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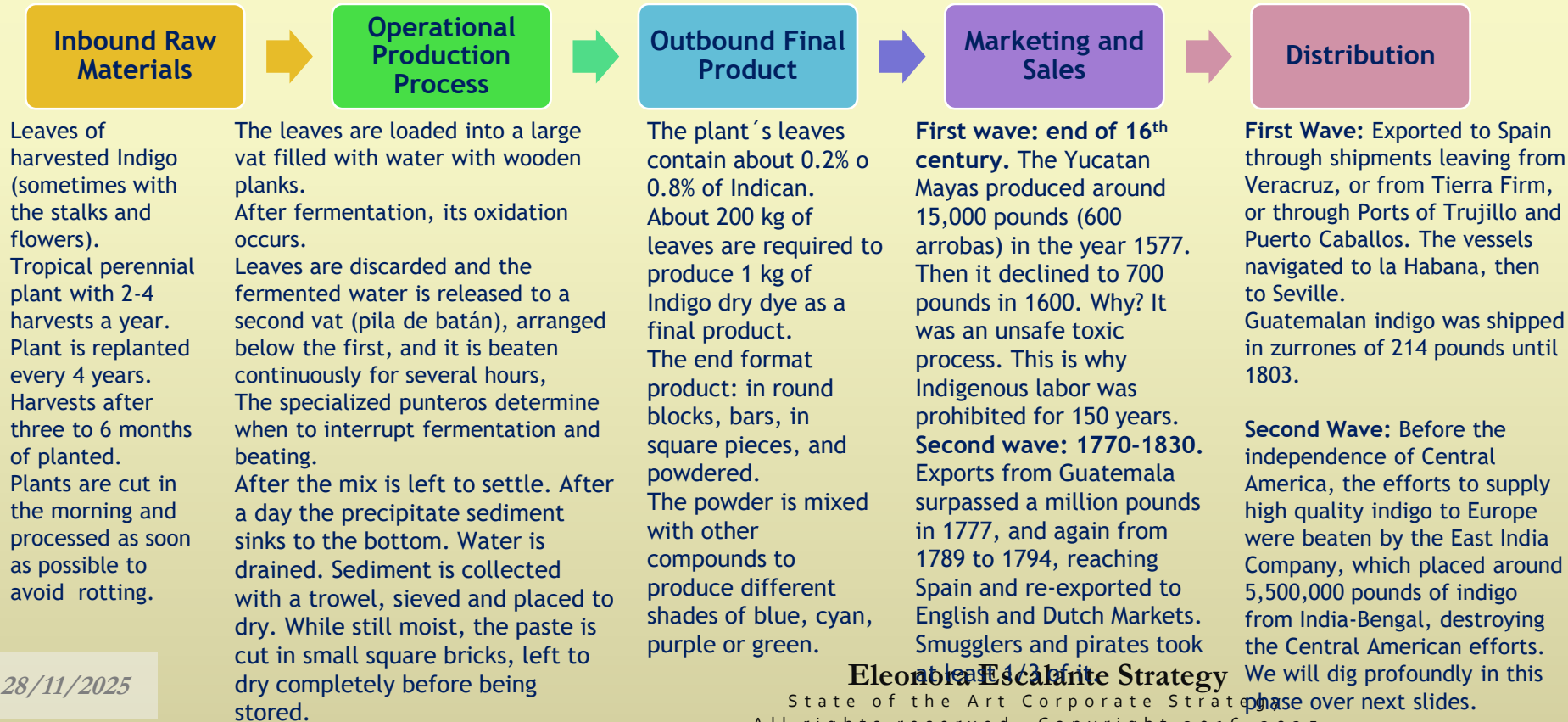


The Indigo Courage in Central America

Indigo 101.

General Description of the Indigo economic activities

Indigo value chain was simple. It became profitable because Europe determined its demand



The Kingdom of Guatemala Indigo included El Salvador and Guatemalan plantations/obrajos. Its final product was highly profitable in times of scarcity supply, and it opened the region to international and inter-regional trade.

Indigo production was supposed to become the core “Good” out of Central America. The plants thrived (despite the locusts and plagues), the demand was booming in Europe, the operational process required excellent “punteros” and low-skilled workers, except during the harvest season, and Guatemala Indigo had a precious high-quality. However, its production was extremely toxic, and it negatively involved the utilization of Native Indians or African slaves.



Mayan Blue. Woman weaves traditional fabric. Source https://es.123rf.com/photo_49677213_la-mujer-teje-la-tela-tradicional.html

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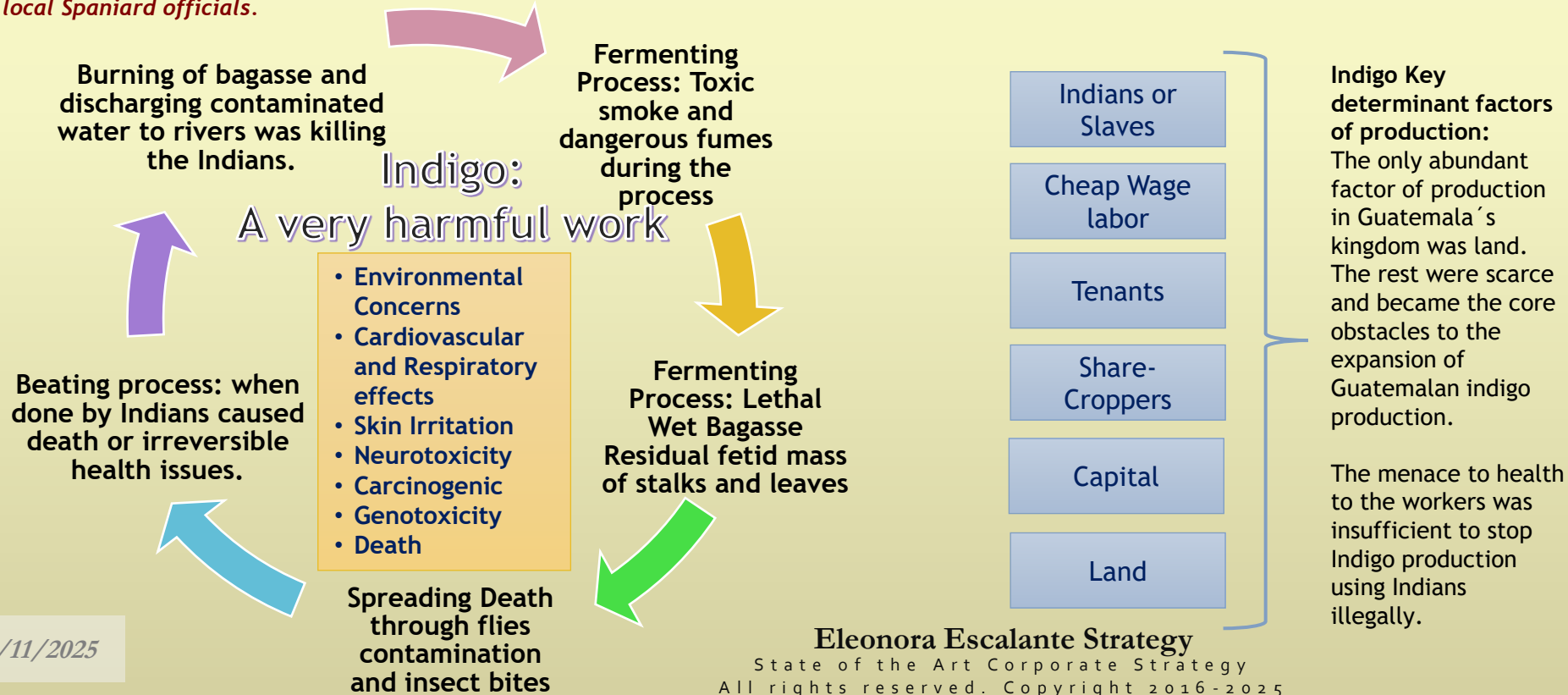
Indigo 101.

The toxic side of Indigo Operational Process.

Despite that royal orders prohibited the Indian Native labor in Indigo processing, the Criollos-Spaniard growers continued to manufacture it (in stagnant scale during the 17th century), using bribery with the *visitadores españoles* and corruption with the local Spaniard officials.



During the first wave of Indigo production (1590-1620), the industry expanded quickly... By 1620 there were over 200 *obrajes de tinta de añil* in San Salvador, more than 40 in the *Corregimiento de Esquintepeque*, over 60 in Guazcapan, Zapotitán and many more in San Miguel, Tecpanatitlán, La Choluteca and Nicaragua.



Despite that royal orders prohibited the Indian Native labor in Indigo processing, the Criollos-Spaniard growers continued to manufacture it (in low-scale during the 17th century), using bribery with the *visitadores españoles* and all types of corruption with the local Spaniard officials. Despite that large landlords replaced the manual beating process by the 18th century, only 1/3 of plantations exploited those technologies. The rest was in the hands of small size planters who extracted from 6 to 100 pounds per year, and they continued using the manual beating. Researchers have discovered a correlation between slavery and indigo trade in the kingdom of Guatemala.

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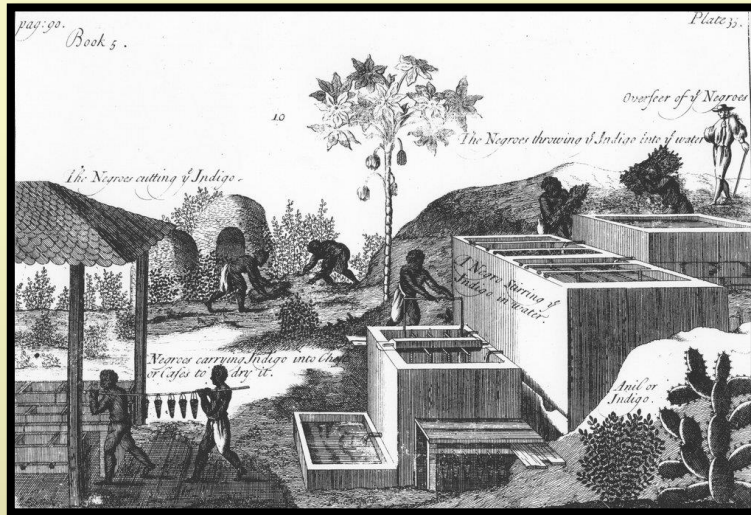


The Indigo Courage in Central America

Indigo 101.

The shortage of labor for Indigo Crops and production caused the import of African Slaves.

During the 17th century, there are documents that prove about Royal Spanish concessions of African slaves for Central America Indigo plantations.



Slaves were used for Indigo Production:
<https://www.meisterdrucke.ie/fine-art-prints/Unbekannt/726352/Producing-Indigo-Dye-with-Slave-Labour:-West-Indies-or-Central-America.html>

Legal records

There are plenty of examples in which the Royal Crown received requests regarding imports of slaves to the kingdom of Guatemala. Two of them described below:

1. Year 1664: Import of 2,000 slaves of African descent request from the City of Guatemala, exclusively employed in Indigo dye production. These slaves were introduced via Cartagena, Portobelo and Veracruz.
2. Year 1671: Santiago de Guatemala representative requested to import 500 slaves annually, for extraction of indigo.

In both cases, slaves were not paid for their labor, and could buy their freedom, by amortizing that purchase in the long run, despite that mortality rates were high.

Illegal proceedings

The illegal ways to meet the demand of workers for indigo production were:

1. Smuggling: Fraud, illegal activities and traffic of slaves occurred during the 17th and 18th centuries. It seems that slave traffic used Belize, Jamaica or Barbados through English traders between 1660 to 1670.
2. Buying slaves at lower prices (by evading the taxes aranceles and asiento rights).



Despite that Indian Natives labor was banned by the Royal Crown of Spain, the convenience of using African slave workers in indigo was well known in the Caribbean and Central America. Gradually African slaves were introduced from the 17th century for indigo production.

It is very important to notice that the Guatemalan Indigo was cultivated in El Salvador during the second wave of production.

We are positioned in time before the fragmentation of the kingdom of Guatemala into 5 nations (17th-18th centuries).

The Marqués de Aycinena from Guatemala was owner of 1/6 of the total indigo production of the kingdom, and he held relevant lands in El Salvador.

The Guatemalan Indigo Growers' Society was the Sociedad de Añileros de la Villa de San Vicente de Austria, located in the Province of San Salvador.

Despite that the indigo plantations were located in the Pacific Coastal plain, from the northwest corner of Guatemala (facing the Pacific), to the Shore of Lake Nicaragua, the headquarters of the Guatemala Indigo Growers society was decided to stay in San Vicente de Austria, El Salvador.



San Vicente City of Austria and Lorenzana was made the capital of State of El Salvador during the period of the Federal Republic of Central America. The Society of Cosecheros de Añiles of the Guatemala kingdom (established in 1782) chose to administer a fund (called montepío) to finance working capital to growers. Coincidentally, currently, the Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) is in the San Vicente Department, El Salvador.

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The Indigo Courage in Central America

Indigo production and trade from 1770 to 1830

When the Catholic Church was seized by the Bourbon Reforms, indigo plantations re-emerged again.

Let's explore the main statistics of indigo cultivation in the kingdom of Guatemala.

Since Indigenous natives were banned from the obrajes of indigo, the rest of castas were required to work the indigo: ladinos, mulattoes, mestizos, sambos, African free-men, and the rest of mixed races. In 1785, 99 Indigo haciendas received draft labor of 1,026 Indians, and 3,284 castas individuals. The repartimiento was replaced by debt peonage.

The Economy Collapses

Table 10.1: Export and Production of Flor Quality Indigo, 1779–1810 (in pounds)

Year	Amount	Year	Amount
1779	133,666 exported	1797	7,982 exported
1780	111,352 exported	1798	19,780 exported
1781	111,254 exported	1799	21,000 exported
1791	79,546 exported	1802	56,640 exported
1792	24,500 exported	1804*	230 produced
1794	26,900 exported	1805*	26 produced
1796	19,780 exported	1808*	6,000 produced
		1810	1,804 produced

Quality: the highest quality of indigo is the pigment that comes from the flower, the finest of all. The Indigo flower put the Kingdom of Guatemala on the international tinctures spotlight. Only between 1779 to 1781, the flower quality represented 21% of all indigo exports of the region.

Table 10.2: Duty on Indigo Imported Into Great Britain from the British Caribbean, 1798–1819

Date	Rate Per Pound
July 5, 1798	15s
Oct. 1, 1801	Free
May 12, 1802	18s
July 5, 1803	14s 3/4d
June 1, 1804	15s 7 1/2d
April 5, 1805	15s 11 1/4d
May 10, 1806	16s 11 3/4d
July 5, 1809	33s 4d
April 15, 1813	39s 7d
July 5, 1819	41s 8d

SOURCE: Lowell J. Ragatz, *Statistics for the Study of British Caribbean Economic History, 1763–1833*.

Taxation issues: Britain was driving the international pricing. When the British EIC business in Bengal attained a relevant export volume, Britain imposed high protective duties upon indigo coming from the Americas.

Table 10.3: Average Annual Exports of Indigo from Central America, 1772–1813

Years	Pounds	Years	Pounds
1772–1776	561,000	1797–1801	1,006,000
1777–1781	834,000	1802–1804	637,227
1782–1786	884,000	1805	n.a.
1787–1791	1,016,000	1806–1810	719,648
1792–1796	1,035,000	1811	n.a.
		1812–1813	340,000

SOURCES: Smith, "Indigo Production," pp. 195, 197, and Floyd, "Indigo Merchants," p. 487; A.G.I. Guatemala 668, Fiscal of New Spain (1821) gives ten-year average figures between 1772 and 1802 that confirm the calculations of Smith and Floyd; Rubio, "El añil," p. 342; *La Gazeta de Guatemala*, 19 de noviembre de 1804, 55; Rubio, *La historia del añil*, I: 357–58.

Volume exports from Guatemala:

The highest peak of exports occurred between 1787 to 1801, overpassing 1 million pounds. However, Americans, Haitians and Guatemalans abandoned indigo production as of the 19th century, because of multiple issues, but mainly because it stopped to be profitable. After the UPCA failed, Guatemala country left the Indigo production, and only El Salvador continued with its punctual efforts.

The large-scale indigo planting in Bengal, India began as of 1777 through the British East India Company (EIC), and the prices/taxation were driven globally by the EIC.

Table 10.4: Average Annual Indigo Production According to Dunn, 1791–1818

Years	Pounds
1791–1795	989,260
1796–1800	761,252
1801–1808	n.a.
1809–1813	543,518
1814–1818	375,298

SOURCE: Dunn, *Guatemala*, p. 212.

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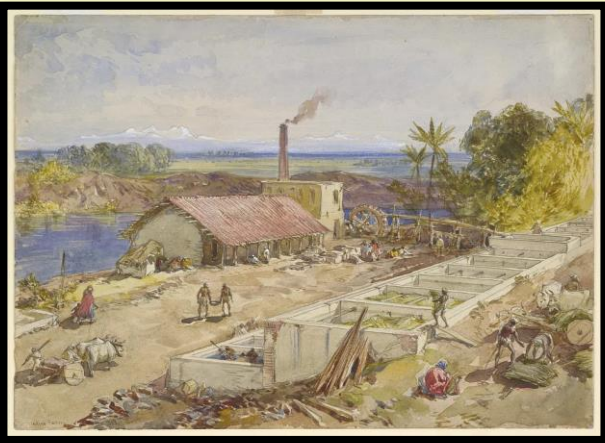
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The Indigo Courage in Central America

Indigo production and trade from 1770 to 1830

Let's explore the process of the globalization of Indigo production



A Bengal India Indigo Factory

<https://www.worldhistory.org/image/16627/bengal-indigo-factory/>

TABLE 2. Indigo imported into England from Bengal and other parts of the world between 1783 and 1800					
Year	From Bengal (pounds)	From Other Regions (pounds)	Year	From Bengal (pounds)	From Other Regions (pounds)
1783	93,047	1,121,506	1792	581,827	1,285,927
1784	237,230	1,259,149	1793	881,554	1,015,148
1785	154,291	1,540,774	1794	1,394,620	1,464,874
1786	253,345	1,725,712	1795	2,862,684	1,412,165
1787	363,046	1,517,284	1796	3,897,120	651,550
1788	622,691	1,474,220	1797	1,754,223	390,967
1789	371,469	1,599,749	1798	3,862,188	171,218
1790	531,619	1,309,196	1799	2,429,377	549,943
1791	465,198	1,145,595	1800	2,674,317	1,004,642

Source: Adapted from Phipps, A Series of Treatises on the Principal Products of Bengal, 1832, p. 49. Source: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/indigo-plantations-and-science-in-colonial-india/64DB8D7223A2661899C6312F6DD12E7B>



After the French Revolution, the consumption of indigo was driven to fashion trends and military uniforms.

Most of the troops fighting wars were using blue uniforms.

Indigo stopped to be a luxurious royal tincture, and it propagated to the military and "blue collar" workers of the industrial revolution factories (the proletarians).

The globalization of Indigo was one of the most successful events during the first industrial revolution, but it has been registered as one of the most disastrous human commercial choices. Why?:

1. Producing indigo implied health danger for its workers.
2. It is associated to African Slavery, an evil form of human exploitation
3. It is the same old story of volume vs. price: When the product was scarce, the differentiation strategy applied for luxurious segment. When the product became a massive volume out of India, it broke all the global entrepreneurs who couldn't drive down their labor prices to zero.
4. Zero wage is slavery. Debt peonage is slavery. Both conditions applied to Indigo plantations all over the world.

The expansion of Indigo second wave at the Kingdom of Guatemala occurred during the same period of the first industrial revolution in Europe.

Inter-imperial competition cannibalized the industry. Britain textiles required to ensure inflow of Indigo dyes during uncertain times, and the door of opportunity opened for Central America. However, the EIC invested heavily and protected India Bengal indigo, where the reduction of costs was the greatest.

Particularly, as soon as the American Revolution wars, threatened the USA supply to Britain.

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The Indigo Courage in Central America

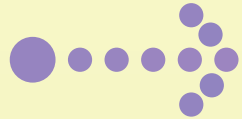
Indigo production and trade from 1770 to 1830



The demand of Indigo was directly correlated to the textiles industry of the British Empire.

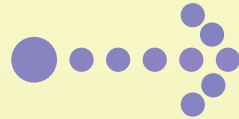
Comparative Situational analysis of the main competitors during this period

Guatemala Kingdom



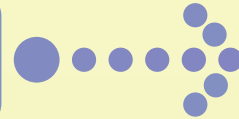
- Indigo was an important export crop for Guatemala but the situation of the Indian labor made it non-competitive.
- Guatemala Indigo was mainly cultivated in El Salvador and the Pacific coast of Guatemala country.
- The control of the production and trade was in the hands of the merchants of Guatemala City, (as Aycinena), who provided cash advances as working capital to the growers and controlled the export trade. It was a profitable financing!
- 80% of all production of Guatemala was going to Britain and the Netherlands.
- The differentiation uniqueness value proposition of Guatemala Indigo was its highest quality.

Haiti



- French individuals in Saint Domingue switched from Tobacco to Indigo by the end of the 17th century.
- In 1694, the French government banned all exports of foreign indigo to protect the Indigo from Haiti and appropriate the supply to the textiles of France.
- Half of French Haiti indigo was re-exported to Germany or the Netherlands.
- By 1730s, there were more than 3,000 indigo farms in Haiti.
- In 1790s, in parallel to the French Revolution, coffee and the slave revolts of the independence destroyed the foundation of indigo in a flash.

USA-South Carolina



- British colonies farmers of USA, in South Carolina experimented with indigo as early of 1670s.
- Indigo was re-introduced during King Georg's war (1739-48), cutting the supply of indigo from the French Haiti.
- In 1737, 138,300 pounds of indigo were exported to Britain, and it increased to 1 million pounds in 1775.
- The American Revolutionary War (1775-83) disrupted indigo production in the USA. When indigo exports declined in the 1790s, Britain turned to India to meet its indigo demand, and the Guatemala Indigo became the back-up for a few decades, meanwhile Bengal strengthened its competitive position.

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Britain-Bengal

- Bengal indigo investments of the EIC began as of 1777. This was exactly in the period of the American Revolutionary War.
- Indigo plantation was introduced in Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, Murshidabad of Bengal; and in Champaran and Kheda of Bihar.
- The British textile industry decided to bet for safe suppliers of indigo, from British controlled territories.
- British authorities promoted, protected and supervised the Bengal British indigo planters using the model of the Caribbean and Central America, and then adapting it to the Indian local conditions.
- By 1837 Indigo was the main article of exports of India.

The globalization of Indigo was driven by Britain textile production. When Britain shifted all its production investments to Bengal in India, it also acted as a price protector of its own growers in India.

Whatever the Kingdom of Guatemala, or Haiti, or South Carolina-USA could do to re-take the indigo industry up, wasn't relevant for Britain anymore after Guatemala's Kingdom Independence from Spain (1821).

Britain created a backward vertical integration of its value chain in India, and the Indigo industry of Central America sunk forever.

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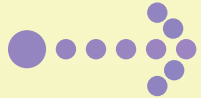


The Indigo Courage in Central America

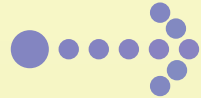
Indigo production and trade from 1770 to 1830

The Indigo transformation of Bengal-Bihar India.

1780



1859



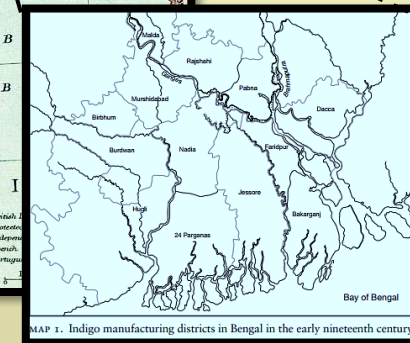
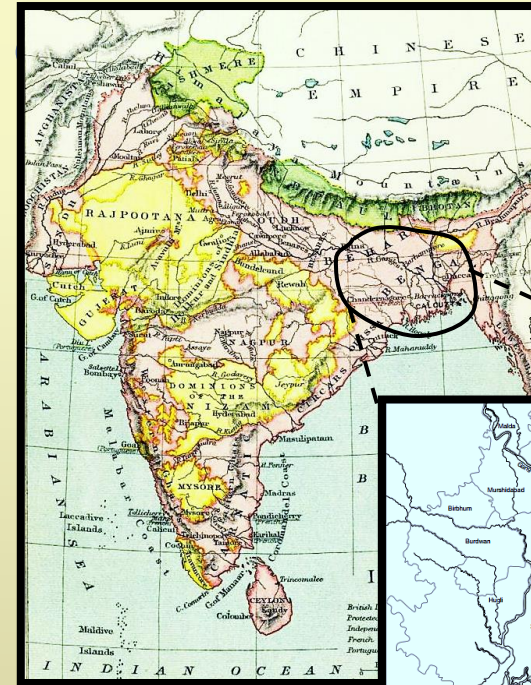
1897

The industry was incipient with only a few British entrepreneurs. By 1830, these plantations grew to about 500 enterprises, and on average, each farm was about 1,000 ha. All these farms together produced and exported around 4 million Kg of indigo, making a gross profit of 40% per year. All indigo planters were Europeans. The Indigo growers introduced new models of organization, technologies, labor discipline and conflicts.

The indigo Revolt (Nil Vidroha) was a peasant uprising of indigo workers (ryots) and farmers (Indian zamindars) against British indigo planters that occurred in the districts of Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, 24 Parganas and Jessore. The motive: rejection of slavery policies against Indian and forced cultivation of indigo. This occurred in the aftermath of the closing of the EIC by the British government.

Bengal and Bihar Indian indigo farms were producing around 19,000 tons of Indigo delivered only to London. Adolf Baeyer, a German chemist, was able to synthesize the Indigo, and by 1901, the production of synthetic indigo collapsed the Indian Indigo natural Production.

By 1914, the production dropped to 1,000 tons and later it declined to minimum amounts.



MAP 1. Indigo manufacturing districts in Bengal in the early nineteenth century

TABLE 6. *Quantity and value of natural indigo into London, 1896-1902*

Year	Quantity (cwt.s.)	Value (rupees)
1896-7	169,523	43,707,570
1897-8	133,849	30,574,019
1898-9	135,187	29,704,781
1899-1900	111,420	26,925,107
1900-1	102,491	21,359,808
1901-2	89,750	18,522,554

Note: (1 cwt or centumweight = 112 lbs.)
Source: *Journal of the Society of Dyers and Colourists*, January 1903, p. 19.

The foundation of the Indigo production industry was slavery, and human drudgery in the middle of unhealthy protocols. Any resemblance to similar current empires is purely coincidental.

Source: Table and maps from Kumar, P. Indigo Plantations and Science in Colonial India. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

adapted from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/indigo->

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The Indigo Courage in Central America

Indigo production and trade from 1770 to 1830

In summary, the Britain-Germany first industrial revolution in textiles...

- Globally, it was after 1750, that Indigo exponential growth took the relevant priority for the textiles industry.
- The tincture of clothing was a piece of the value chain of textiles, and indigo was integrated to it.
- Despite that indigo was important for the nobility and the royal families before the 17th century, it wasn't until it became a global commodity for military clothing and blue-collar workers (proletarian employees of the new industries), that indigo became important.
- Britain secured its supply of indigo at the lowest cost agriproduct region which belonged to their empire: Bengal-Bihar, India. By selecting it, the rest of Indigo production centers were left behind.
- The Kingdom of Guatemala Production of Indigo was temporarily designed (as a back-up) of the Asian production for Britain.
- The globalization of Indigo was a great economic success, but also a human labor tragedy.



A global product can change the rules of the economic system. Indigo plantations is a clear example of how a leader empire can manipulate prices, consumption and demand in the context of global

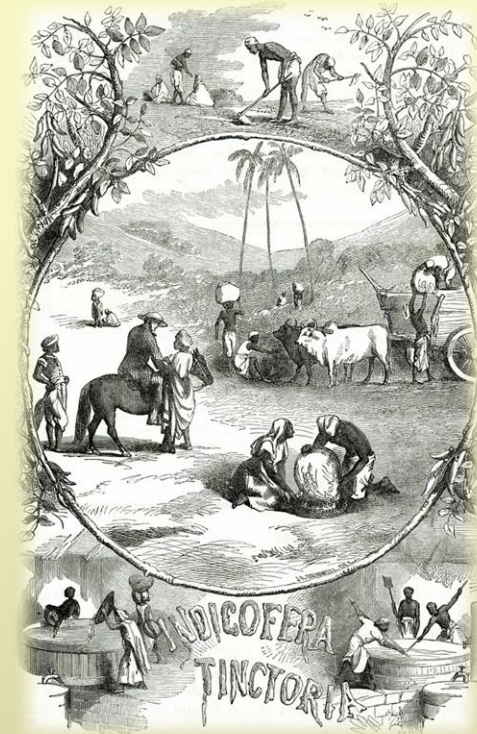


Photo Source: <https://www.shutterstock.com/blog/history-of-indigo>

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Indigo production and trade from 1770 to 1830

The Indigo tragic nuances of a global blue story

The demand of Indigo was directly correlated to the textiles industry of the British Empire.

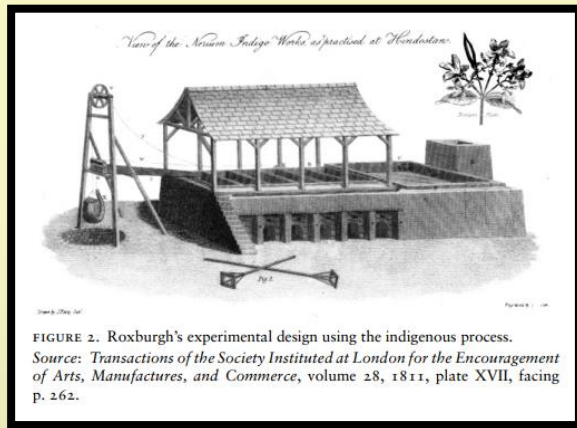
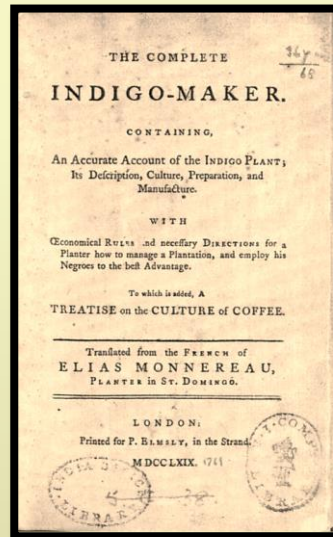


FIGURE 2. Roxburgh's experimental design using the indigenous process.
Source: *Transactions of the Society Instituted at London for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce*, volume 28, 1811, plate XVII, facing p. 262.



Source: Photo sources from Kumar, P. Indigo Plantations and Science in Colonial India. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/indigo-plantations-and-science-in-colonial-india/64DB8D7223A2661899C6312F6DD12E7B>

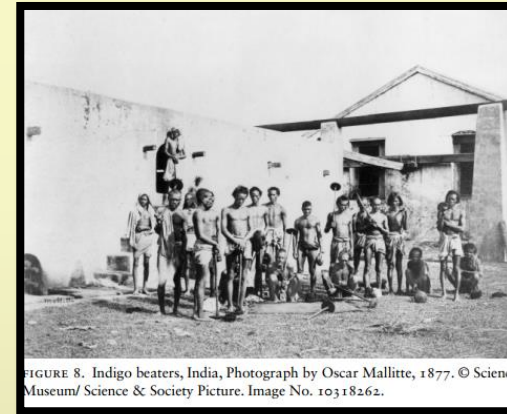


FIGURE 8. Indigo beaters, India, Photograph by Oscar Mallitte, 1877. © Science Museum/ Science & Society Picture. Image No. 10318262.



FIGURE 7. Indigo factory, India, Photograph by Oscar Mallitte, 1877. © Science Museum/ Science & Society Picture. Image No. 10318250.



In 120 years, the Bengal-Bihar industry of Indigo was one of the most profitable plantations in the world. However, in 1860, after the rebellion, “the Indigo commission” renowned it: “not a chest of Indigo reached England without being stained with human blood”. Indigo plantations past are a story of tragedy, human slavery, economic bondage and deadly subjugation.

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