

THE SPANISH COLONIAL MODEL

In this class we are going to be intimately concerned with the theoretical structure and pragmatic working of the British colonial system in North America. To understand why the British began entertaining colonial aspirations and how the British thought their colonial system should function, we must first consider the Spanish colonial system – the one Columbus began in 1496.

I. Why is the Spanish Empire and its colonial model so important?

- A. it was the first colonial empire the European world produced
- B. it was the biggest colonial empire the West had seen since the fall of Rome
- C. it was the wealthiest colonial empire
- D. Spain in the 16th century was the most powerful state in Europe

II. When was it set up?

Established at Santo Domingo on Columbus's Second Voyage in 1496. This was the first permanent European settlement in the New World.

III. By 1607, when England established its first permanent settlement at Jamestown in North America, Spain's American dominion extended nearly 8000 miles, from southern California to the Straits of Magellan.

IV. There were three main lines of Spanish conquest in the Americas.

- A. First, the subjugation of the Caribbean islands and coastal areas
 - 1. Columbus (1492-1504) in the Caribbean
 - 2. Balboa's penetration of the Panama and his discovery of the Pacific
 - 3. Ponce de Leon's discovery of the Florida mainland.
- B. The second wave was stimulated by rumors of vast treasures hidden in a highly civilized state deep in the interior.
 - 1. Led to the conquest of the Aztec empire of Montezuma in Mexico (1519-21) by Hernando Cortes.
 - 2. Extending Cortes's efforts were, Cabeza de Vaca who circled the northern periphery of the Gulf of Mexico (1528-36)
 - 3. Coronado in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Kansas;
 - 4. Hernando de Soto, who discovered the Mississippi River (1539-41).
- C. The third great thrust of Spanish conquest was led by Francisco Pizarro, who conquered the Incan empire by murdering their leader, after extracting a ransom of over twenty tons of pure gold and silver, and destroying their army and nobility. In 1535, he began the new central city of Lima.

V. The problems of the Vast New Empire

- A. Well early on it was "bloody" chaos, constant confusion
- B. Conquistadores not men who took orders or followed rules. They were not men who listened to authority figures, they declared that they were the authority figures.
- C. The Catholic Church: if church demands allegiance, then political decentralization seems to occur. Final allegiance must be to someone
- D. Space, time, ocean

VI. Solutions

- A. Centralized Colonial Government
 - 1. ***Casa de Contratacion*** (board of trade) - 1503
 - 2. ***Council of the Indies*** (1524)
 - 3. Viceroyalties: Vicekingdoms
 - New Spain (1535) and Peru (1542).
 - 4. Viceroyalty:
 - 5. Audiencias
 - 6. Presidencias: administrative subdivisions

No governmental body in the Empire created law but the Council of the Indies. In this sense the Empire was absolutely centralized.

B. Stable Relationship between Church and State: **Patronzto Real de Indias** (1508)

C. The Social makeup of Spanish America

1. Amerindians
2. Major Imperial Officeholders (Peninsular Spaniards)
3. Creoles (American-born leaders whose parents were both Spanish)
4. Blacks and Racially mixed persons

VII. Conclusions

Finally, this was the greatest colonial system of the 16th century. It was the model for both the English and French systems that would follow.

A. This system had no colonial legislatures, but the leaders in the colonies followed the laws passed by the Council of the Indies.

B. There was no political class developing that might have the power or the desire to throw off the Spanish system.

C. The Amerindians, blacks, and racially mixed had no power, while the Spaniards and Creoles were tied to Spain for their authority.