

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. 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.

III. 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.

IV. The problems of decentralization. How would little Spain control the vast empire?

- A. Well early on it was "bloody" chaos, constant confusion
- B. Conquistadors 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

example: A Peruvian minister left Cadiz, Spain in May 1735 to travel to Peru. By the time he reached Peru it was January 1736 (43 days at sea, the rest of the time on land traveling to post). He then wrote a letter to the Spanish government to let them know he had arrived and to get orders. This letter had to travel back to Spain, where the authorities responded in writing. By the time he got their response, it was April 1737. Basically, the trip one way takes eight months. This slows the spread of information and makes governance a difficult process.

V. Solutions

A. centralized government

B. stable relationship between church and state

C. a government capable of putting a developed body of laws wholesale onto subject peoples, Spain had this. It had come together after centuries of conquering and incorporating peoples on the Iberian peninsula.

D. Good monarchs, Ferdinand of Aragon, Isabella of Castile married 1469.

VI. Solutions explained: The Structure of the Spanish Colonial System

A. Centralized Colonial Government

1. In 1503, the first of the major imperial institutions, the Casa de Contratacion (board of trade), was created. The *Casa*, resident in Seville:

- a. licensed all equipment and operations engaged in trade with America
- b. enforced the commercial laws and regulations
- c. collected customs duties and colonial crown revenues
- d. kept the commercial accounts for the entire empire

2. In 1524, the Council of the Indies was established, and the *Casa* came under its authority. The Council of the Indies, in the king's name:

- a. controlled the legislative and the executive governance of the colonies
- b. issued all colonial laws and decrees, civil and religious
- c. appointed all the officials, clerical and secular, who enforced the colonial regulations
- d. it served as a court of last resort for the entire judiciary system of the colonies
- e. it censored all publications in America
- f. it audited the accounts of the colonial treasurers.

3. Viceroyalties

- a. The chief governmental unit in America itself was the **viceroyalty**, of which two were created in the sixteenth century: New Spain (1535) and Peru (1542).
- b. These massive jurisdictions were ruled by **viceroy**s endowed with large and ambiguous portions of royal power and established in seats of glittering splendor.

4. Viceroy:

- a. maintain civil order
- b. are in charge of the military
- c. revenue collection
- d. are in charge of the welfare of Indians
- e. are in charge of dealing out justice

5. Audiencias

- a. Below the viceroys were the **audiencias**, of which in the sixteenth century there were four in New Spain (Neuva Galicia, Mexico, Guatemala, Santo Domingo) and five in Peru (the three main ones being Panama, Santa Fe De Bogota, and Lima).
- b. The audiencias were royal courts with direct access to the Council of the Indies and subject to its veto only

6. Presidencias

- a. **Presidencias** were administrative subdivisions of the large Viceroyalties. These were the main jurisdictions. Within an Audiencia there are relationships like Viceroy-Audiencia relationship. Local bodies.

7. None of the governmental bodies in the Empire legislate except the Council of the Indies. All other bodies of government are responsible for carrying out or enforcing the Council's laws.

8. Although Local power may be defacto (in fact), it was not ever dejure (in law) in Spanish system.

9. The Council of the Indies had ways to check up on the Imperial government

- a. Visita visit, system of checking up to report to the Council. This was announced
- b. Residencia what did you do during your residence as viceroy or on the Audiencia. This was a tedious examination and analysis that would determine your later career
- c. Pesquisa unexpected visit. Royal officials dropping by.

B. Relationship between Church and State

1. In the 16th Century, Spain's religiosity and the Spanish Catholic king or queen were central to the Catholic Church's counter-reformation. To use Spain's power and military the church had to make concessions to the Spanish rulers.

2. 1508 Patronzto Real

- a. The Spanish king got the right from the papacy to give all church positions in the new world
- b. to deal with church revenues and orders
- c. to veto Papal Bulls on certain issues.

3. The State exercised this right to keep the church in the new world controlled by peninsular Spaniards.

C. The Social makeup of Spanish America

1. The social makeup of Spanish America helped guarantee a welcome for the crown's supremacy and that helped stifle competitive institutions.

2. There were four principal social categories in the Spanish American population.

a. Amerindians

1. The most numerous by far.
2. The native Americans quickly became a mass laboring population
3. They were incapable of organizing their own political institutions to speak against the state.
4. Powerless in society, they had been defeated by Spanish disease and arms

b. Major Imperial Officeholders (Peninsular Spaniards)

1. "Peninsular Spaniards" were born on the Iberian Peninsula and were committed to returning to Spain after completing their tour of duty abroad
2. This was the smallest group in Spanish America
3. These men, however, had the most power
4. They were the viceroys, *audiencia* judges, high church officials, and governors.
5. Almost all high officers of the state who served in Spanish America in the three hundred years of the colonial period were peninsular Spaniards

a) In the entire colonial period there were only 4 American-born viceroys, and only 14 of 602 other high civil officers were Creoles, that is, American-born leaders whose parents were both Spanish.

b) The church hierarchy was similarly recruited: of 706 Spanish-American bishops and archbishops, 601 were peninsular Spaniards.

6. The crown's policies in recruiting and controlling these officers prevented them from developing subversive institutions.

- a) Their tenure in office was strictly limited
- b) They were circulated within the imperial system to prevent their acquiring too strong an identification with any particular locality
- c) They were dependent on the crown treasury for their salaries
- d) They were subjected to rigorous scrutinies of their conduct of office.

c. Creoles (American-born leaders whose parents were both Spanish)

1. Of the total population of more than 9 million in Spanish America in the 1570s, only 118,000 or 1.25 percent were entirely of European ancestry.
2. In the entire three hundred years of the colonial period, only 300,000 Spaniards emigrated to America.

3. So, there were few Peninsular Spaniards to carry out the everyday actions within the empire.

4. The Creoles filled in the upper strata of the American communities

5. They were landowners, clerics, army officers, and merchants

6. **BLOOD SUPERIORITY:** Their identity as a ruling class, and consequently their well being, derived not from their American birth but from their European descent, which distinguished them racially from the mass of the population. As a consequence, their basic interests were always associated with Europe; they continued to identify themselves with Spain, which was the source of their status, wealth, and power.

d. Blacks and Racially mixed persons

1. At the bottom of the social hierarchy.

2. Africans were imported as slaves and never acquired an active political role

3. Politically and socially more important was the large segment of the population that was **racially mixed**.

4. By the 1570s the racially mixed elements constituted approximately 2.5 percent of the entire populace

5. By the end of the colonial period that figure had risen to over 30 percent (another striking contrast to British America, where the racially mixed population was numerically insignificant).

6. There was a great variety of racial combinations, but the most important element by far was the *mestizos*, those of mixed European and Indian ancestry.

7. Yet, though numerous and though many of them passed into the Creole population, the *mestizos* in general were socially inferior to the dominant Spanish elements and constituted a lower middle class of small farmers and shopkeepers.

VII. This system had weaknesses, like corruption, overlapping duties, and blockages in the flow of crown authority, but the system continued to function in a reasonably coherent manner.

VIII. 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.