



## **SPAIN IN THE NEW WORLD**

After 1492 Spain took lead in launching expeditions of exploration and colonization. Its motives were to acquire wealth, found an overseas empire, and bring the Roman Catholic religion to the Indians. In addition, Spanish adventurers were eager to seek their fortunes in the newly discovered territories.

The following explorers and conquerors were chiefly responsible for fulfilling Spain's ambitions: *Juan Ponce de León, Vasco de Balboa, Ferdinand Magellan, Hernando Cortés, Cabeza de Vaca, Francisco Pizarro, Francisco Coronado, Hernando de Soto, Juan Cabrillo*

### **I-The Spanish Empire in America:**

Spain acquired control of South America (except Brazil), the West Indies, Central America, Mexico, Florida, California, and southwestern United States. About 200,000 Spaniards migrated to the New World and founded some 200 settlements. The Spaniards built cities; established churches, schools, and missions; mined precious metals; raised cattle; and farmed the land. They shipped huge quantities of gold and silver to the mother country. This wealth made Spain for a time the richest and most powerful nation in the world.

### **II-Character of Spanish Colonial Rule:**

**I. Government:** The Spanish colonies were divided into large provinces, called viceroalties. Each was administered by a *vicero*y appointed by the king. As the king's personal representative, the viceroy exercised complete power. He carried out the laws

enacted by the Council of the Indies in Spain, collected taxes, controlled the finances, and was responsible for the welfare of the Indians. The people had little voice in the government.

**2. Commercial Regulation:** Spain strictly supervised the commercial life of its colonies. Mining and agriculture were encouraged, but the production of goods that would compete with Spanish manufactures was prohibited. Also, the colonists were permitted to trade only with the mother country.

**3. People of Spanish America:** Only Spanish Catholics were permitted to immigrate to the colonies.

The *mestizos*, people of mixed Spanish and Indian parentage. They functioned as laborers, small farmers, artisans, and trades people. At the bottom of the social scale were the Indians and blacks. Both groups served as slaves in the plantations and mines.

**4. Treatment of the Indians:** The king decreed that Indians should be treated in humane manner, but this order was generally disobeyed. In practice, the Indians were ill-treated and abused by the colonists.

### **III- Spain's Legacy to America:**

For about 300 years a large part of western Hemisphere was governed by Spain. During this time Spain helped shape the course of American civilization in the following ways:

**1. Religion:** The Spaniards introduced Christianity into the New World. They converted thousands of Indians to Roman Catholicism. They built churches in every city and village in Spanish America, including the magnificent cathedrals in Lima and Mexico City. The cathedral in Mexico City begun in 1573 is still the largest church structure in the Americas.

**2. Language:** Spanish is the official language in nearly all of the countries of Latin America. In the United States, Spanish is widely spoken in Florida, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, as well as in many large, northern cities such as New York.

**3. Foods and Animals:** The Spaniards brought over the following fruits, plants, and animals unknown in the New World: orange, lemons, olives, wheat, rice, horses, donkeys, pigs, and sheep.

**4. Education:** The first universities in the Western Hemisphere were founded in the 1550's at Lima and Mexico City the first printing press in the Americas.

**5. Architecture:** Many private dwelling in Florida, California, and Southwest reflect the Spanish influence to this day.