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## Spain and Its Early Empire in America

On the eve of Europeans' first sustained contact with the Americas, Castile was the largest, most prosperous, and most populous kingdom of the Iberian Peninsula. Victory over the Muslims in Granada in 1492 confirmed Castilians' belief that they enjoyed their God's favor. Simultaneously it demonstrated that military success led grateful monarchs to reward service on their behalf by enriching aristocrats, elevating commoners into the nobility, and providing poor soldiers with land.

Conquistadors, settlers, officials, merchants, clerics, and a growing stream of Spanish women followed Columbus and other explorers, founded municipalities, expanded royal dominion, and sought corresponding recompense. As settlement followed conquest, the immigrants replicated insofar as possible the social organization they had left behind, with the important difference that many assumed more elevated social status. Their leaders awarded the most fortunate grants of native labor and tribute (*encomiendas*). These *encomenderos* became a new but insecure nobility, for the Crown initially recognized the grants for only one lifetime rather than making them hereditary. Thus, it denied recipients a key attribute in the perpetuation of aristocratic families in Spain while making them dependent on royal favor. Charles I (1516–1556) introduced royal officials to oversee the tribute and labor that reverted to the Crown as the original recipients died. At the same time, he indicated that he would name unrewarded conquistadors and their heirs to these new positions. The installation of government offices, the erection of bishoprics, an increase in missionaries, and the foundation of nunneries

accompanied the continued arrival of peninsular immigrants and the growing number of their predecessors' native son and other creole descendants. By 1580, the institutions of Church and state as well as a transatlantic trading system were in place, and rising silver production was enriching the treasury of Philip II. By this date as well, descendants of the conquistadors and early settlers recognized that the prosperity based on *encomiendas* had largely disappeared and their pursuit of positions in the Church and state intensified.

## Spain on the Eve of Empire

Marked by mountains, few navigable rivers, and an extensive coastline, the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 contained five kingdoms. Castile, Aragon, Granada, and Navarre would later comprise the country known as Spain; Portugal was joined to the Crown of Castile from 1580 to 1640. Conquered by Muslim invaders that first arrived from North Africa in 711, Iberia was the site of intermittent warfare for centuries as Christians emerged from modest mountain bases in the north and commenced what became known as the Reconquest. Toledo fell to the Christians in 1085 and in the thirteenth century Ferdinand III of Castile and León conquered Córdoba, Murcia, Seville, and Cádiz. The advance southward brought booty, land, and upward social mobility, especially for mounted warriors. As a legendary hero in a thirteenth-century epic declared, "I gain more in war than I do in peace, for the poor knight lives better in times of war than in times of peace."<sup>1</sup> By the mid-eleventh century, the expanding nobility sought to limit this status to their children, but intermittent warfare on the moving frontier impelled monarchs to reward the military contributions of particularly valorous commoners with ennoblement.

As the frontier advanced, the Crown encouraged repopulation through the creation of chartered Christian municipalities and land grants. Settlers in new and refounded towns received urban and rural plots and access to the community's land. Nobles gained and later expanded large estates, as did the military orders of Alcántara, Calatrava, and Santiago. The fall in 1492 of Granada, the last independent Muslim kingdom, reinforced the booty mentality of the Reconquest and reaffirmed commoners' awareness that conquest on behalf of the Castilian Crown could yield noble rank among other rewards. Some 35 000–40 000 Christian

colonists arrived to repopulate the kingdom between 1485 and 1499, and by 1530, about 100 000 were present. Leaving one's home for an anticipated better life remained attractive.

Inheritance shaped ruling families and their patrimony as well as those of nobles and commoners. The Spanish monarch Charles I (1516–1556) inherited through his Castilian mother the kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, and Navarre, the Basque Provinces, Sicily and Naples, and the Indies; from his Habsburg father he received the provinces of the Netherlands, Franche Comté, and Austrian and German lands. He ruled each of these territorial units as if it were his only realm, confirming its laws and privileges or *fueros* as the latter were known in Spain. As sovereign of a vast composite monarchy, Charles united his extensive inheritance through his person rather than by common laws, customs, taxes, institutions, or languages.

Nearly all Iberians in the late fifteenth century were commoners. In cities and towns they included merchants and international traders, professionals in law and medicine, officials, clerics, retailers, artisans, tradesmen, and domestics. Most commoners – over 80% of them – lived in villages, farmed, raised livestock, and worked as artisans, tradesmen, and weavers. They walked to their fields, grazed animals, and gathered wood from their town's municipal lands.

Villages provided residents with a sense of identity, a focus of loyalty, and kinship ties. Villagers were citizens and local office holders. Prejudiced regarding outsiders, they would occasionally resort to violence against men from other villages over such things as boundary disputes and use of municipal woodlands and pastures. Nevertheless, they needed those outsiders. Itinerant peddlers often sold the items not available in local shops. Rural craftsmen and artisans including shoemakers, blacksmiths, and carpenters similarly took to the road to expand their market. Migration and mobility were frequent and not simply a response to economic woes or other problems.

At the base of Iberian society were slaves. Slavery was common during the Reconquest as victors enslaved prisoners of war; the conquest of Granada (1482–1492) yielded thousands. African slaves entered Iberia from trans-Saharan trade by at least the fourteenth century, and starting in 1479, the Portuguese became major suppliers of sub-Saharan slaves.

Everywhere in Iberia, the Church with its clerics, saints, relics, and bells affected inhabitants' lives. Like the nobility and municipalities, the Church as a corporate body had its own *fuego*. Numerous clerics

ministered in urban churches and monasteries, but every village had a parish church, celebrated a patron saint, and enjoyed religious festivals. The presence of a cleric on even an occasional basis emphasized the centrality of religion in village life. So, too, did the requirement to pay the tithe, a tax on agricultural production, and the increase in livestock that went to the Church.

### *Place of Birth and Identity*

Iberians' greatest loyalty was to their family and the municipality within which they were born and lived. This allegiance diminished as the municipality was included in a larger jurisdiction. Thus, a man born in Seville would identify himself first by his family, then as a *sevillano* (native or *natural de* Seville), next as an Andalusian, and finally as a Castilian or Spaniard. Each Castilian was a subject or vassal of the monarch as well as a citizen of a municipality, the foundational building block of the kingdom's territorial organization. Although cities were self-governing and initially exempt from royal jurisdiction in their internal affairs, in the many towns and their villages under the jurisdiction of an ecclesiastical or noble lord or a military order, citizens were also vassals of their lord. Castilians' identity thus expanded from family to municipality to lord to Crown.

By birthright free individuals in Castile became citizens (*vecinos*) of their home village, town, or city. This status typically began when marriage transformed a new husband into a family head. As a citizen he fell under his municipality's judicial system, normally paid its taxes, and could be counted on to display solidarity with neighbors against outsiders from another village. Outsiders were initially suspect even (or perhaps especially) when born in an adjacent town. After taking up residency in a new locale, it required time for them to become citizens themselves, a status that often followed marriage to a local woman and the payment of local taxes.

Monarchs of Castile in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries confirmed villages' right of self-government, generally acknowledged that local citizens should hold local offices, and accepted that those born in them enjoyed preference. Accordingly, a native (*natural de*) and citizen (*vecino*) of a village enjoyed specific privileges that originated in charters granted during the Reconquest. Place of birth also restricted royal appointments and ecclesiastical positions. Within Castile and Aragon, men native

to each kingdom filled its posts. When the Crown of Castile annexed the southern portion of Navarre in 1513, the terms of its incorporation limited to a handful the number of Castilian officials in the kingdom. Clerics similarly benefited by appointments to ecclesiastical positions in the diocese of their birth.

Opposition to outsiders could be intense. The Comuneros' Rebellion of municipalities and some lower nobles against Charles I in 1520 occurred in part because the monarch, an outsider born in the Flemish city of Ghent and initially unable to speak Castilian, arrived with numerous Flemish advisors. These quickly acquired prominent positions and devoted themselves to self-enrichment. Although the rebellion failed, Castilians long remembered its defense of native sons' right to offices.

### *The Model of the Castilian Nobility*

Legislation divided Castilian society into distinct estates (noble, clerical, and commoner) and corporate bodies based on function, for example, merchants' and artisans' guilds, each with its own judicial status. Villages frequently included nobles as well as commoners who were peasant-farmers (*labradores*). Their offices might be divided between the two estates or selected without distinction. In general, the percentage of nobles in Castile declined from north to south. Most Andalusian aristocrats made Seville their urban residence. Although only 15 of its nobles held the titles of count, marquis, or duke at the end of the sixteenth century, they included several of great opulence, enormous rural properties, and jurisdiction over numerous villages. Their princely and ornately decorated palaces, abundant retainers and servants, costly clothing, horses, and other signs of riches and status provided a model observed by the thousands of emigrants who left for the Indies via this port city on the Guadalquivir River. Of course all emigrants recognized the affluence, power, and privileges of members of aristocratic families located closest to their homes, but most nobles were of lower rank. These *hidalgos* tenaciously claimed the benefits of their estate, but typically lacked the wealth of the urban and titled nobility.

Nobility initially rested on leadership and notably valorous military deeds, but lineage was its usual source in the fifteenth century. Nonetheless, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabel of Castile distributed hundreds of grants of nobility (*hidalguía*) as compensation for personal and military contributions, especially in the years before, during, and immediately

after the fall of Granada. By explicitly identifying the reciprocity between service and tangible rewards on the eve of empire, the Crown ensured that the conquistadors in America would expect royal remuneration proportional to their achievements.

Nobility conveyed legal benefits that included exemptions from imprisonment for debt; seizure of one's house, horse, or weaponry for debt; torture; and certain types of punishment. Of particular symbolic importance was exemption from the direct taxation (*pecho*) paid by commoners. Indeed, documenting if one owned arms and horses, lived a military lifestyle, and was a descendant of a family that had not paid the direct tax for three years or more was often sufficient to demonstrate *hidalgo* status. In addition, noblemen alone were eligible for knighthoods in the military orders.

The number of nobles created by Ferdinand and Isabel and their successors paled in comparison to nobles by heredity. Nobility was a family rather than an individual quality, and noble lineage, especially through the male line, was its most important qualification. The titled nobility of dukes, marquises, and counts numbered fewer than a dozen in 1400, and Castile had but 62 in 1520 and about 120 as late as 1600. As a sign of their rank, titled nobles and their legitimate offspring were addressed as "don" ("lord") or "doña" ("lady"), honorifics whose usage spread to the lower nobility starting in the early sixteenth century. In the late sixteenth century, some 10% of the population of Castile claimed nobility, the highest percentage in a western European country.

Early in his reign, Charles I, established *grandees* as the highest nobility of Castile. This additional honor confirmed the preeminence of a small number of families, most with titles of nobility awarded after 1450, that owned enormous, entailed estates (*mayorazgos*) over whose residents they exercised jurisdiction and collected fees (*señorío*). The privileges of the nobility in general and the ability of *grandees* and other nobles to transfer wealth and seigneurial rights to their heirs constituted a model that conquistadors and first settlers in America soon sought to emulate.

## *Religion*

For centuries religion divided the Castilian population into Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The substantial majority was composed of "Old

Christians,” those whose families were Christian before the forced conversion of many Jews in 1391 created “New Christians” or *conversos*. Spain’s religious diversity ended when Ferdinand and Isabel expelled the Jews in 1492 and the Muslims in 1502. Their actions simultaneously increased the number of *conversos* and made emigration attractive. Despite legislative prohibitions, some New Christians would sail to the Indies and settle there.

In the mid-fifteenth century, statutes began to require proof of *limpieza de sangre* (“purity of blood”). Designed to exclude New Christians from civil and ecclesiastical positions, entry into a knighthood, and even some educational opportunities, they forced aspirants to prove their eligibility through documenting a lineage without Jewish or Muslim ancestors. The military orders became renowned for their detailed reviews of ancestry; obtaining a knighthood “proved” *limpieza de sangre* and frequently noble ancestry as well.

With few exceptions, early Castilian emigrants to America took with them a shared belief in Christianity as well as loyalty to their monarch, extended family, and others from their hometown. They left a social environment marked by hierarchy and corporate bodies as well as widespread prejudice against outsiders and newcomers. They also carried an understanding of the characteristics and significance of nobility in Castilian society and a conviction that conquest and the establishment of permanent municipalities would bring royal recompense that could include noble status and income. Immigrants in the Indies drew upon these values as they sought the upward social mobility and economic status beyond their reach in Iberia. Thus, they worked to create a living environment complete with the Iberian food, drink, and amenities they enjoyed. Of particular importance, they believed, like nobles in Castile, that they would be able to bequeath rewards they had earned to their descendants.

## Peninsulars Create Their New World

Iberians first arrived in the western hemisphere or “the Indies,” as Christopher Columbus christened it, in 1492. Soon, Spanish ships were annually depositing European Spaniards, almost exclusively Castilians, in America. African slaves brought from Seville first reached the New World in 1501, and their regular importation from Africa began in 1518,

the eve of Fernando Cortés' expedition to the mainland that includes today's Mexico. By 1580, the institutional and geographical frameworks of both state and Church extended from New Spain in the north to Chile in the south and from the coast of the Pacific Ocean in the west to the Atlantic coast in the east. Cities were the lifeblood of Spanish civilization and, throughout this vast area, Spanish and Portuguese explorers and settlers had established more than 225 municipalities. As chronicler Francisco López de Gómara noted: "Without settlement there is no good conquest, and if the land is not conquered, the people will not be converted."<sup>22</sup> With the permanent founding of Buenos Aires in 1580, the contours of regional societies built around a small number of administrative and commercial cities and mining centers were firmly in place, and Brazil's sugar production was underway in the region around Bahia.

### *Crossing the Atlantic*

Iberian emigrants, like the French, English, and Dutch who followed them to America, shared the common experience of crossing the Atlantic Ocean. Sailing from Andalusia to Española averaged a little over seven weeks; reaching Vera Cruz or the Isthmus of Panama frequently required another three to four weeks. Lisbon to Bahia could take up to two months, depending on the season. No transatlantic voyage was for the faint hearted. Before sailing, Spaniards were to document their *limpieza de sangre* and to obtain a royal license specifying a destination and reason for traveling. Private citizens often noted their poverty and a relative in the Indies who had offered to pay for the trip. By 1600, Portuguese emigrants also had to secure a license to sail to Brazil.

Ships in the early sixteenth century often accommodated between 100 and 120 people who had on average less than 17 ft<sup>2</sup> each for luggage, a sea chest, and food. Also on board were pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, cockroaches, lice, and bedbugs. Only the wealthiest travelers could obtain privacy in small wooden chambers constructed in the castle of the ship. Other voyagers made do with hanging curtains. Another cost was travel to Seville. Since it took some 80 days to walk from Asturias or a still long 30 days from Madrid, reaching Seville could require a significant sum. The total expenses meant that licensed passengers were persons who had some means, had access to credit, had passage paid by the Crown or a relative already in the Indies, or were in the employ of another traveler.

Not uncommonly, emigrants liquidated their assets to pay for the trip. Notwithstanding examples of stowaways and forged licenses, the best way to get to the Indies for young men without means was to join a prominent official's retinue or to sign on as a sailor. More ships departed for America than returned and to jump ship at a New World port was usually relatively easy.

### *Spanish Emigrants to the Indies: Males*

Men were the first Europeans to reach the Indies. Columbus transported no women on either his initial voyage or, although accompanied by 1500 males, on the second in 1493. The growing presence of abusive and exploitive Spaniards and the ravages of epidemic disease nearly eliminated the indigenous population on the island of Española in less than 30 years. Rapidly publicized conquests, led most notably by Fernando Cortés in Mexico and Francisco Pizarro in Peru, attracted additional immigrants. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a foot soldier with Cortés, summarized their objectives: "[T]o serve God and His Majesty, to give light to those who were in darkness, and to grow rich, as all men desire to do."<sup>3</sup> Between 1560 and 1600, males accounted for over 70% of the arrivals from Iberia and comprised an even larger majority for the remainder of Spanish rule.

High mortality and disappointment plagued the early newcomers. Many returned to Spain and others perished prematurely, including two-thirds of all Spaniards in Española within the first decade of settlement. Overall mortality among the conquistadors on the mainland of America was also high. Despite exaggeration and self-promoting claims, survivors and descendants of deceased conquistadors had a solid factual foundation when referring to the suffering and death of their companions, fathers, and other relatives. The expedition to Castilla del Oro in 1514 led by Pedrarias de Avila left Seville with 1500 men or more; soon after landing at Darien two-thirds of them died. More than half of 2100 Spanish conquistadors of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan were killed. An even worse disaster was the expedition led by Pánfilo de Narváez to Florida in 1527; only four of approximately 600 men survived. Some 1600 men led by Pedro de Mendoza arrived at the River Plate in early 1536. Two-thirds of them died by late 1537 and, according to a German chronicler, some survivors succumbed to cannibalism.

Like gamblers unable to leave the table, many Spanish conquistadors repeatedly joined expeditions in their search for greater and sometimes any rewards. Among the conquistadors of Tenochtitlan, almost a quarter reached the Indies by the end of 1513, and nearly 20% were remnants of the large, disastrous expedition led by Pedrarias Dávila. Many would-be or actual conquistadors perished, leaving neither wife nor legitimate children behind. High mortality underscored a widespread belief among survivors throughout the Indies that, as one of them expressed: “[T]he least of the conquistadors merited great reward, for at his own expense . . . he gave the king so great a world as this.”<sup>4</sup> In 1519, Europeans in the Indies totaled fewer than 5000 spread among a small number of municipalities and the Cortés expedition.

Length of time in the Indies influenced a conquistador’s opportunities and rewards. Fernando Cortés probably arrived in 1506 and his chief lieutenant, Pedro de Alvarado did so in 1510. About half of the 168 “Men of Cajamarca” who captured the Inca Atahualpa and shared his ransom had spent five years or more in the Indies. Approximately half of the identified conquistadors of New Granada boasted five to nine years of prior New World experience. The difference in an expedition led by an “old hand” like Cortés or Francisco Pizarro or by a “greenhorn” like Pedrarias could determine success or death.

Claims of nobility by conquistadors and first settlers in New Spain, Peru, and elsewhere increased over time. In fact, probably more than 90% were commoners. Only 16 *hidalgos* were present with Cortés at the founding of Vera Cruz in 1519, and just 69 have been confirmed among over 1200 identified conquistadors of Tenochtitlan. Nobles among the “Men of Cajamarca” numbered an unusually high 23%. Other than royal officials, subsequent immigrants were also mostly commoners, but, aside from some sailors, generally above the dregs of society. Early arrivals included a few professionals, merchants, artisans ranging from cobblers and tanners to blacksmiths and silversmiths, and varied laborers. The missing category was peasant-farmer, by far the dominant occupation in Spain. New arrivals of this background had no intention of engaging in agricultural labor again. Notably, Spanish immigrants in the Indies included neither numerous criminals sent into exile, as was the case in Brazil, nor indentured servants as comprised 75–85% of English immigrants in the Chesapeake in the seventeenth century.

By the mid-sixteenth century, single, vagabond Spanish males of unspecified birthplace were causing problems. The instructions for

viceroys of New Spain Luis de Velasco in 1550 identified these men as settling in native villages where they abused the indigenous people, raped wives and daughters, and created other difficulties. Velasco was to remove them from the villages and order them to find gainful employment. He was also to watch the peninsular secular clerics and friars, a majority of whose behavior allegedly set bad examples.

Nearly 70% of over 55 000 identified immigrants between 1493 and 1600 came from Andalusia, Extremadura, and New Castile. Their origins gave them first-hand knowledge of nobles owning and controlling large estates and villages populated by impoverished laborers. Although small in number, Basques were the most distinctive group to arrive. They participated in the expansion and administration of Castile's possessions in the Indies as captains and sailors, merchants and miners, clerics and officials. They brought skills in deep-sea fishing, iron production, ship-building, agriculture, herding, and international commerce. Additionally, they enjoyed historic privileges confirmed by Charles I. These included juridical equality and "universal nobility," the latter endowing them with a unique and favored legal status that, added to their frequent success and prominence, fueled resentment among other peninsulars, notably those from Andalusia and Extremadura.

Basque inheritance practices accustomed families to their sons leaving home. They favored a single heir, whether male or female, and sons passed over worked either outside of the farmstead on their community's common lands or beyond their native locale in mines, foundries, commerce, or other activities. Extending their destination to the Indies remained within the traditional practice. Although some learned to speak Castilian, all spoke Euskara, their native tongue. When residing outside of their native locale, they had a history of creating mutually advantageous networks that, like their universal nobility and distinctive language, often set them apart from other emigrants.

In sum, Spanish emigrants to the Indies ranged from the small numbers of grandees who sailed as viceroys in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to stowaways and single-trip sailors unable to pay their passage. They included the fully literate, persons able only to sign their names, and many complete illiterates. Although entire families made the voyage, a majority of travelers were young men eager for a better life in the more open societies and economies of the Indies. Wealthy or poor, literate or not, Europeans arrived with a skin color that marked them as "white" and a spoken language that underlined their

distinctiveness. At least in their own eyes, pale skin placed them above persons of indigenous, African, or mixed ancestry.

Relatively few Europeans realized the dream of returning to Spain. The men present at Cajamarca were unique in receiving substantial shares of gold and silver, a form of riches that, along with precious jewels, could be transported to Spain. Nonetheless, more than half of them remained in the Indies. As part of an extraordinarily fortunate conquest, they could usually obtain an *encomienda* and remain in Peru as part of a new, self-styled aristocracy. But even very successful men discovered that the economic and social advantages they had gained in America were place bound. One could neither transfer Indian laborers, land, nor office to Spain nor safely leave them with an overseer or manager charged with forwarding profits via Seville. Probably more than 90% of the immigrants remained in the Indies, although some tried multiple locations.

### *Spanish Emigrants to the Indies: Females*

Few Spanish women sailed to the Americas before 1560. Columbus conveyed the first ones, a total of 30, on his third voyage in 1498. Nearly 10% of the identified females reached the Caribbean by 1519; these early arrivals sailed primarily to already settled Española. A small number subsequently accompanied campaigns of conquest. At least 15 *conquistadoras* followed Cortés; at most two remained single. In contrast, only men were present at Pizarro's celebrated capture of the Inca, although two presumably immigrant women joined them at Cajamarca and accompanied them to Cuzco. The percentage of females increased between the 1520s and 1550s and exceeded 25% of the newcomers for the remainder of the sixteenth century. About 60% of those arriving from 1560 to 1599 were unmarried.

The number of Spanish women in Peru rose from maybe 200 at the time of Pizarro's assassination in 1541 to perhaps 1000 of about 8000 Spaniards in 1555. High male mortality in the Indies left numerous widows. Those with a handsome inheritance from their first husband often remarried a second, third, or even fourth time. The creation of female convents that began in 1540 only modestly reduced the number of Spanish women eligible for marriage.

The Crown recognized the potential damage to families resulting from husbands leaving their wives thousands of miles away and for extended periods of time. Already before Cortés initiated the Conquest of Mexico, the Crown exhorted and even threatened married Spaniards living in the Indies without their wives. Husbands were either to return to their wives in Spain or to send for them; the order clearly sidestepped the reality that some married men undoubtedly had fled to the Indies to get away from their spouses.

The desire to encourage stable families in America led sixteenth-century monarchs to extend benefits to husbands living with their wives. These included continuation of an *encomienda*, land grants near a desirable Spanish settlement, offices, and tax breaks. The incentives worked, especially since early *encomiendas* supported an *encomendero* and his extended family, retainers, and servants. Their recipients were willing to marry for the sake of their households as well as the desire to father a legitimate heir with a Spanish wife. Typically, both spouses wed for practical reasons rather than love. At a reception in Mexico for several young female immigrants in 1528, the guests of honor entertained each other at the expense of their host and his friends. Some women remarked that they would never marry “those rotten old men.” One observed, however, that the men would die soon and leave their assets behind. Then, she added, “[W]e will be able to choose a young man of our liking to take the place of the old one, as one changes an old, broken pot for a new one in good condition.” Although the conversation angered the conquistadors that overheard it, the women almost certainly found husbands in a marriage market that for several decades overwhelmingly favored females from Spain.<sup>5</sup> Only 32 of nearly 500 *encomenderos* in Peru were single in 1563.

By 1600, over 10 000 identified Spanish females had reached the Indies. During the two previous decades, Peru attracted more than New Spain, and New Granada was a distant third. Female Portuguese immigrants in Brazil were always fewer in number than their Spanish counterparts in the Indies. Female Spaniards usually reached America either as wives accompanying their husbands or as daughters or nieces journeying with parents or another relative. Many husbands established themselves and then called for their wives and other relatives, both male and female, to join them. Licensing officials considered this an acceptable reason for travel when accompanied by a promise of necessary financial support.

After the mid-sixteenth century, families sailing together were more common than earlier. Nonetheless, even then, Spanish families were only about half as likely to emigrate as a group as were English families that arrived in New England in the seventeenth century.

The Spanish Crown's policy toward single women journeying to the Indies varied over time. In 1539 it tried to prevent such travel, but the restriction proved ineffective. Faced with a surfeit of women in Spain and a shortage in the Americas, it subsequently encouraged their passage. While single women did emigrate as servants and retainers of officials' wives, only eight unwed females were among more than 50 retainers and servants licensed to accompany a viceroy and his wife to New Spain in 1566. With unmarried Spanish women at a premium, these few did not change the balance. Philip II changed policy in 1575 after the viceroy of Peru complained about the arrivals' dissolute character. Nonetheless, the Spanish Crown sent neither groups of women of dubious background to become wives of soldiers and colonists as the French practiced later in Canada, nor orphans and prostitutes as did the Portuguese in Brazil.

The paucity of peninsular women barred most male immigrants from marrying females from home. Until the native daughters of Spanish families were of age, some conquistadors and early settlers married indigenous women, especially those from the nobility, and fathered legitimate children. Nonetheless, most offspring of Spaniards and native women resulted from less formal unions. If reared in their father's home, these illegitimate children were culturally Spaniards and routinely accepted as such. If reared in their mother's home, they were considered indigenous. When unwanted by either parent, they joined the growing number of *mestizos*, a term applied to these racially mixed offspring in Mexico starting in the late 1530s. *Mestizos* joined the mulatto offspring of (almost always) Spanish males and African females, and other persons of mixed ancestry to constitute the *castas*, a collective noun applied to the entire racially mixed population marked by illegitimacy or the suspicion of it due to African ancestry. By 1580, multiracial hierarchies were in place in Spanish cities throughout the Indies as the initial distinction between "Christians" and the indigenous yielded to lineage and legitimacy.

The white population in America expanded from several thousand by 1520 to some 120 000–150 000 in 1570 as a result of continued peninsular immigration, natural reproduction, and the acceptance of some persons as whites despite only partially Spanish ancestry. In early seventeenth-

century Lima, females and males of Spanish descent in Lima were roughly equal in number. Native daughters of well-to-do families were brought up to become wives and mothers. While some entered the nearly 50 convents available by 1600, a substantial majority wed (Figure 1.1), and large families were not unusual, especially among the more well-to-do.



**Figure 1.1** A lady of Lima wearing her wedding dress. Successful peninsular merchants and officials in Lima often married young native daughters of the city's elite families.

Source: John Constance Davie, *Letters from Buenos Ayres and Chile* (London: R. Ackermann, 1819), 64. Reproduced by permission of the Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Native daughters and sons born of successful conquistadors and early settlers continued to pay homage to these ancestors, for they had established the fundamental social division between Spaniards at the top and all others below them.

### *Seeking the Familiar, Identifying the New*

Spaniards in the Indies aspired to live like titled nobles of Castile with themselves at the apex of the new societies they were creating. During decades of exploration and conquest, they encountered lands and peoples previously unknown to Europeans. They paid their expenses, left behind dead comrades, and shed blood on behalf of their monarch. Survivors assiduously sought what they considered just rewards: permanent grants of native labor and tribute, wealth, higher social status, a Spanish wife, a municipal office, a palatial urban residence, and land for livestock and crops.

The Indies offered both the familiar and the exotic. Explorers, conquistadors, and settlers sought and found items, notably gold and silver, they knew from experience in Europe. But they also came across much that was new: peoples and languages, religious practices and monumental buildings, plants and animals, food and drink, jungles and hurricanes, illnesses and cures. All forced Spaniards to come to terms with previously unsuspected cultures and environments. They needed labels to identify both what they found and what resulted from their presence. Thus, they homogenized and mislabeled peoples born in the Americas as “Indians” (*indios*), a consequence of Columbus’s erroneous geographical knowledge, and soon began to import Africans. To identify groups in the emerging social order, they invented and adapted terms of varied origins.

The Spaniards’ presence and persistence was evident in old vocabulary used in unprecedented ways as well as new words. “Spaniard” antedated the creation of an American empire and applied to everyone with Spanish ancestry. Used without modification, both “Spaniards” and “whites” or *blancos* referred to all persons of Spanish descent, but only “European Spaniards” were also called *gachupines* and *chapetones*, disparaging terms that emphasized their recent arrival. Because their place of origin was the Iberian Peninsula, contemporaries starting in the early nineteenth century and subsequently historians have designated these Europeans “peninsulars.”

By the early 1560s, the term “criollo” or “creole” identified the American-born offspring of Spaniards as well as others of New World birth accepted as such. The word was already being used to distinguish black slaves born in the Indies from those imported from Africa. Thus, the earliest known usages simply meant place of birth – the Indies – for both Spaniards and African slaves. Licenses to return to the Americas from Spain often referred to a slave born in the Americas as a creole, and at times the word appeared in the name, for example, Juan Criollo. In contrast, the American-born masters were identified as Spaniards from a specific city or region of birth and thus its native son (*natural de*).

The ongoing existence of a peninsular population in the western hemisphere depended upon the continued arrival of Spanish immigrants. In contrast, the creole population reproduced and expanded from within and increased further as a result of marriage between creoles (usually native daughters) and peninsulars (usually males). Although both groups descended from Spaniards, a substantial minority of whites born in the Indies had at least one increasingly distant indigenous ancestor as well. Coupling among Spaniards, Indians, and Africans engendered offspring identified as mestizos, mulattoes, and *zambos*, among other terms.

Although divided by place of birth, both European and American Spaniards could be found in the sixteenth century among landowners, miners, professionals, wholesalers, retailers, artisans, and, occasionally, day laborers, as well as in other income-producing activities. They ranged from the wealthy to the impoverished. While occupational, social, and educational differences resulted in diverse perspectives and concerns, they shared one overriding belief: ancestry, religion, and conquest made them superior to all non-Spaniards.

### *Spaniards in Early Municipalities*

Spanish settlers as well as the Crown believed that civilized life required communities, and thus the creation of municipalities was indispensable for implanting Spanish culture. Encouraged by Ferdinand, Isabel, and later monarchs, settlers clustered together to establish towns and cities on Caribbean islands and the American mainland. These included rechristened preconquest cities located within a large, sedentary indigenous population: for example, Cuzco in Andean Peru. In other cases,

such as Puebla de los Angeles in Mexico, the Spaniards founded new communities. Most followed a grid pattern extending from a large, central plaza flanked by a church, a municipal building, a royal office, and merchants' stalls. By 1580, they included administrative centers, regional market centers, ports, and mining camps, some of which evolved into full-fledged municipalities. Spaniards dominated all of them even when a minority of the population.

Founders included conquistadors and first settlers (*pobladores*) who held or soon obtained grants of indigenous labor and tribute (*encomiendas*). They erected a municipal government, became aldermen, and granted themselves choice residential lots close to the central plaza. They also filled local offices overseeing basic services that included the administration of justice and the use of honest measures for meat, bread, and other products sold in shops and markets. If living conditions proved tolerable, most founders planned to settle down. The initial shortage of Spanish women meant, of course, that a number of settlers lived with and in some cases married non-white women. Their legitimate and illegitimate offspring contributed to the racial diversity that quickly marked Spanish cities and towns.

Immigration from Spain and migration from elsewhere in the Indies contributed to the creation and growth of municipalities. The island of Española in 1514 had 14 towns with 392 *vecinos*, 92 married to Castilian women and 54 to indigenous. Founded on the ruins of Tenochtitlan, the city of Mexico in 1526 had some 600–750 peninsulars, a number that rose to about 2000 Spanish *vecinos* by 1550. With 15000–18000 white residents in 1574, it held about 30% of New Spain's total. African slaves in the capital numbered some 8000 and mulattoes another thousand. Antequera (Oaxaca) in 1525 had about 125 Europeans and was only modestly larger in 1544. Puebla increased from 42 adult peninsulars in 1531 to 205 in 1534; between 1531 and 1560, female immigrants comprised just over a quarter of its population.

The white population in South America also expanded rapidly. Spanish immigrants reached Peru quickly after word spread of Atahualpa's treasure and at least 2000 were present by 1536. In the 1590s, an estimate of Lima's population revealed that blacks and mulattoes outnumbered all other residents combined. Among Spaniards, females outnumbered males by 1636, but their combined total was less than the black population. In Chile, Europeans and their legitimate descendants increased from about 150 in 1540 to some 7000 in 1570.

Their growing numbers accentuated for Spaniards the critical importance of controlling the native population's labor, services, and tribute.

### *Initial Spanish Control of Labor, Services, and Tribute*

In his first two voyages, Columbus obtained a little gold and some curiosities, but not the wealth he had promised Ferdinand and Isabel. Foreshadowing later expeditions to Mexico and South America, however, during his second stay on Española he defeated the native Tainos (Arawaks) in battle, enslaved captives, and inaugurated a tribute system. When he returned to the island again in 1498, he found a faction of Spaniards in rebellion. To mollify them, he inaugurated *repartimiento*, the division and assignment of the Tainos into grants that typically included a chief (*señor*) and a village or villages of "his" Indians, to labor for specific Spanish settlers. Formalized in 1503 under Governor Nicolás de Ovando, this distribution of indigenous labor to Spaniards known as *encomenderos* quickly split the conquerors into an elite with access to ample labor and a larger group without it. The latter's antipathy toward Columbus reflected an antforeign, in his case specifically anti-Genoese, sentiment as well.

Conquistadors carried the expectation of *repartimiento* to the mainland and demanded the grants after every successful campaign. *Encomiendas* and native slaves were the most valuable rewards Cortés distributed following victory over the Aztec. Initially without authorization, he awarded thousands of tributaries to about 300 conquistadors and a few other old hands. Francisco Pizarro followed suit after taking Cuzco, and later frontier governors (*adelantados*) allotted labor and tribute after each new conquest. Factional disputes often followed over who received the grants, the reasons for their selection, and the number of natives assigned. *Encomenderos* did agree, however, on one issue – inheritance. All wanted the legal right to bequeath their grants.

*Encomenderos* were never numerous. In Mexico there were fewer than 600; in Peru, Quito, and Charcas, under 500; and in New Granada, only 280. These modest totals left most conquistadors and first settlers empty-handed. While recipients anticipated supporting a family with an *encomienda*, the grants varied substantially in size and value. *Encomenderos*, moreover, sought to wring all possible value from "their Indians." Forced to provide manual labor; to transport goods; to pay tribute; to

have their wives and daughters seized and their lands usurped; in short, to put up with unlimited abuse and exploitation, natives in *encomiendas* during the 1520s and 1530s suffered a living hell. Population decline resulting from disease, abuse, overwork, changed and inadequate diet, and other causes soon reduced *encomiendas*' worth.

Although *encomenderos* valued tribute, access to labor was more critical for economic success. They wanted workers to transport goods, construct houses and other buildings, work in mines, tend animals, and plant, weed, water, and harvest crops, among other assignments. Access to labor, moreover, was necessary to make land grants valuable. Those who diversified their investments through their use of native labor and tribute were able to survive economically as the indigenous population plummeted. Those who failed to do so were even more anxious to bequeath what remained of their grants, partly because *encomendero* status was still the Indies' most prestigious social rank. But the signs were ominous; by 1555, more than half of the *encomenderos* in New Spain had failed to retain their awards in their immediate families.

### *An Alternative to Encomienda*

The Crown viewed *encomienda* warily and in 1530 introduced in New Spain the Castilian office of *corregidor* to oversee the collection of tribute from *encomiendas* that reverted to its control. To fill the position, it recommended that the *Audiencia* of Mexico name former *encomenderos* and other worthy conquistadors and first settlers. The New Laws issued in 1542 contained three provisions to benefit conquistadors and their heirs:

1. "In the distribution of *corregimientos* the first conquerors are to be preferred."
2. "Those first conquerors and their heirs who have no Indians in *encomienda* are to be provided for out of the tributes of the Indians removed from *encomiendas*."
3. "*Corregimientos* are to be assigned preferably to those conquerors who were not provided for [in the distribution of *encomiendas*], and to their sons."<sup>6</sup>

In early 1543, the Crown clarified for New Spain that it considered "the first conquistadors" to be those who served with Cortés when he

arrived in New Spain and were present at the surrender of Tenochtitlan. These men had earned the title and were to be preferred in royal grants (*mercedes*). *Corregimientos* thus were an alternative to *encomiendas* through which, in essence, the Crown was moving toward becoming the sole *encomendero*.

Besides expanding the number of *corregidores* in New Spain, the Crown established them in other parts of the Americas and increased their authority. By the 1550s, these provincial officials enjoyed civil and criminal jurisdiction over both Indians and Spaniards in their districts. Because it linked viceregal government in the capital to native municipalities and provided a salaried position with ample opportunity for illegal gain, the new provincial post, at least in populous districts, became highly desirable. Not surprisingly, appointments to serve as *corregidor* became a major source of contention between peninsulars and frustrated conquistadors, early settlers, and their heirs.

In 1561, Philip II responded to a charge that a viceroy in Peru had ignored meritorious candidates who had served the king there in order to name his peninsular retainers as *corregidores* and other officials. He ordered that the viceroy's appointees be removed and replaced by *personas beneméritas*, that is, by conquistadors, first settlers, and their heirs. Several years later, the king noted that the municipal council of the city of Mexico had appointed outsiders as municipal magistrates and admonished it to prefer and appoint qualified "first conquistadors" and then married settlers. In 1570, he reminded the *Audiencia* of New Galicia that it should name conquistadors and their sons for positions of provincial administration (*alcaldes mayores* and *corregidores*). The Crown seldom consistently followed a strict policy, however, and in the previous year, Philip had forbidden viceroy of Peru Francisco de Toledo to appoint to any *corregimiento* a person who was an *encomendero*, citizen, or native of the jurisdiction's capital and to remove those who were serving.

Nonetheless, in general, the Crown recognized its moral obligations. In 1586, Doña María del Alcazar, widow of a first conqueror with Cortés and recipient of low-yield *encomiendas* inherited by her son, successfully sought annuities for five surviving daughters and two sons from royal tribute income dedicated to descendants of the "first explorers, pacifiers, settlers, and most senior citizens." Not long afterward, Philip II reaffirmed an earlier law of 1568 favoring similar descendants. Although considerable legislation by that time gave preference to the *beneméritos*, as the locally born heirs of the conquistadors and settlers were known,

*encomenderos*' failure to secure inheritable property rights over their grants was manifest.

### *Encomienda and Inheritance*

The overriding issue in the Indies in the mid-sixteenth century was succession to *encomiendas*. *Encomenderos* considered the grants an indisputable mark of high noble status and desperately wanted the Crown to designate them as inheritable property. The Crown objected even more strongly to the idea of a powerful, hereditary nobility with jurisdiction over vassals taking root in the Indies. In the New Laws of 1542, it seemed to end decades of ambivalence toward the inheritance of *encomiendas* when it outlawed the practice and prohibited new grants. The recently named founding viceroy of Peru Blasco Núñez Vela's intention to implement this provision led to rebellion and his death by its opponents. In New Spain, Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza cooperated with the visitor Francisco Tello de Sandoval to delay implementation and requested the Council of the Indies to review its mandate. Upon reflection, the Council allowed grants of *encomienda* to continue for a "second life" and thus retained the loyalty of New Spain's *encomenderos*. Soon afterward it separated labor and tribute in New Spain, assuming direct control over the former in 1549. Although it had backed down over succession for another generation, the Crown refused to recognize *encomiendas* as real property. Instead, it kept *encomenderos* anxiously waiting to see if subsequent "lives" would be allowed. In this netherworld in which they valued hope over experience, financial failure was not uncommon for grantees and their heirs who had neglected to diversify their investments and faced the consequences of their *encomiendas*' falling value as a result of the decreasing indigenous population. In 1549, Extremaduran Juan de la Torre, one of 13 men ennobled for having remained with Francisco Pizarro on Gallo Island in 1527, received an *encomienda* not far from Arequipa, Peru, and proceeded to live well until his death in 1580. Native son Hernando, born in Arequipa to his father's third wife, a woman from Granada, succeeded to his father's grant as well as substantial agricultural land. His heir was less fortunate. Following Hernando's passing in 1610, the native son heir pleaded that his father had left him both enormous debts and a mother and several sisters to support. Left with an

*encomienda* inadequate to sustain his family, he solicited an appointment to office.

In contrast to the De la Torre family's financial travail, *encomenderos* who had wisely invested in land and livestock, agriculture, trade, and sometimes mining and textile production had accumulated significant estates. Officeholders and other peninsulars successful in varied economic activities had become wealthy as well. *Sevillano* Francisco Pérez de Lezcano settled in Trujillo, Peru, in 1551, after a successful military career. The city council granted him an office and some land that he used to build a house and a flourmill. Soon he was exporting flour and had become an alderman. Already independently wealthy, he married a young native daughter whose substantial dowry included a house on the central plaza, more than 25 slaves, numerous cows and swine, and several flour mills. Their daughter Graciana later shared an *encomienda* with her mother and married a captain from Spain who had arrived in Peru in 1534. In this case, as in many others, the female line was central to the incorporation of successful peninsulars in a locally prominent family. Not all Spanish immigrants, however, received such treatment, for earlier arrivals often deprecated those who followed.

### *From Old Hands versus Greenhorns to Creoles versus Peninsulars*

On the "sorrowful night" in June 1520, Cortés, other conquistadors, and native allies suffered heavy casualties as they fled Tenochtitlan. Remembering the flight years later, foot soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo wrote contemptuously that "many" of the men who had arrived in Mexico with Pánfilo de Narváez in 1520 "had loaded themselves" with gold and, as a result of their greed, "the greater number were left at the bridges weighed down with gold."<sup>7</sup> The implication was obvious: experience and wisdom had saved many old hands, but innumerable greenhorns perished because of their greed. The old conquistador's disdain for newcomers (*advenedizos*) persisted throughout the colonial period as revealed in the widespread use of the terms *chapelón* and *gachupín*. The passage of time, of course, resulted in immigrants becoming old hands themselves and, in turn, often viewing more recent arrivals with hostility. This antipathy increased when such men brought appointments to civil or ecclesiastical

office or simply delivered copies of new royal directives that threatened the interests of existing Spanish residents. As native sons succeeded the initial waves of conquistadors and settlers, they and their descendants represented the old hands. The continued arrival of greenhorns who intended to create an enviable life in America as well as peninsulars who hoped to get rich quick and return to their homeland perpetuated competition and rancor with native sons whose birthplace and ancestry linked them more to America than Spain.

### *The Variety of Peninsulars*

Europeans that reached Spanish America were overwhelmingly male. A very few came from Castile's highest noble families, as was apparent in the mid-1530s when Antonio de Mendoza, son of the Count of Tendilla, reached New Spain as its first viceroy. The preeminent administrators in the Indies, viceroys were the personal representatives, the alter egos, of Spain's Habsburg monarchs (1516–1700), and thus vested with the power of patronage and the obligation to use it. They confirmed their status by arriving with large retinues and immediately finding these greenhorns positions, incomes, and sometimes spouses. While some of the clients expected to return to Spain with riches, others accepted that enhanced circumstances in the Indies would lead to permanent residence. These men, and to a lesser degree the retainers of bishops, *audiencia* ministers, and other high-ranking officials, thus represented direct competition to earlier arrivals, native sons, and other creoles in the pursuit of office and economic gain. Despite the high visibility associated with their status and personal connections, these favored peninsulars counted for few of the Castilian immigrants.

Merchants comprised a second significant group of peninsulars. The earliest ones often represented wholesalers in Seville, expected to return to Spain, and refrained from purchasing land or marrying locally. This approach was short-lived. Within several decades, successful merchants frequently married descendants of conquistadors and first settlers who had a claim to an *encomienda*, still the most important designation of elite social standing despite its declining economic value.

Professional men, retailers, and artisans were also immigrants. Many of the initially small number of professionals – notaries, lawyers and procurators, physicians – prospered and their ranks expanded.

Retailers ranged from itinerant merchants to established businessmen with stores adjoining a municipality's central plaza. Indigenous and *casta* women offered competition as ambulatory vendors and shopkeepers at the low end of retail trade. Indeed at times they dominated the sale of a particular product, for example, coca leaves in the mining center of Potosí.

In the early decades after conquest, artisans probably constituted the largest single occupational category of legal immigrants. Whatever their dreams of laborless prosperity, artisans often turned to their trade as a source of income. By the mid-sixteenth century, they had established in major cities guilds that, among others, organized masons and carpenters in Lima and silk weavers, painters, and shoemakers in the city of Mexico. They trained indigenous, *casta*, and black apprentices in the use of Spanish technology to make products that appealed to Spanish tastes. Guilds also founded religious brotherhoods or *cofradías* that provided social interaction and arranged for funeral services and burial of members. Although respectable, peninsular artisans were unable to join the colonial elite, and it was unthinkable that they would order an *hidalgo* to do anything. They belonged to the ranks of commoners and could lay no claim to nobility.

Sailors who jumped ship may have comprised the most numerous group of peninsulars. Many were previously unemployed in Seville or elsewhere and became sailors of occasion who planned to labor during a single outbound trip because they lacked the money to sail as passengers. Reprisals for desertion could be serious, but fugitives had a reasonable chance of escaping. Burdened with a miserable reputation, sailors' major asset in many cases was probably peninsular birth. If able to contact a relative or *paisano* and willing to work, their fortune could improve. Such was the case of Alonso de Bello.

Born into an Asturian *hidalgo* family in 1552, Bello received some schooling and even studied law, at least briefly. A realistic younger son, he recognized that his modest inheritance would not support him and followed many earlier Asturians to the Indies. In 1575, he signed on as one of nearly 20 Asturians on the crew of a ship captained by another countryman. After landing at several other ports, he jumped ship in 1576 at Nombre de Dios in Panama and disappeared from view until the 1580s. He surfaced in the Kingdom of Quito as a muleteer and merchant involved in conveying and selling salt and collecting tribute for some *encomenderos*. Entering a partnership with a textile merchant of Quito,

he transported to the great mining center of Potosí a large quantity of cloth that he sold profitably. Wrapping up his affairs, he returned to Asturias in 1605. There he invested his savings in land and annuities and married a young, wealthy heiress of good family. He died in 1632 without children, a pious and prosperous peninsular whose career demonstrated that with connections, hard work, and luck, not all sailors were lower class failures. A friend of both native sons and Asturians in Quito, his departure with his earnings supported the popular creole argument that peninsulars went to the Indies only to make their fortunes and retire to Spain.

By 1580, peninsulars in the Indies had established an expanding urban world. Most native sons were born and reared in the empire's cities, the heart of Spain's imperial project. In these urban centers, one could find powerful royal and ecclesiastical institutions as well as markets for merchants who specialized in importing European and Asiatic goods. Viceroy, captains-general, *audiencias*, treasury offices, merchant and artisan guilds, owners of haciendas, religious orders, convents, diocesan hierarchies, tribunals or agents of the Inquisition, lawyers, licensed physicians, unlicensed curers, servants, slaves, and the homeless were intimately connected to city life. Organized as hierarchical societies with *encomenderos* and a few officials in the elite, cities also had numerous other Spaniards, the indigenous, and increasing numbers of *castas* and African slaves. Epidemic disease had reduced and in some cases nearly eliminated the indigenous in regions of contact, stripped *encomiendas* of their original worth, and created a labor shortage in many locations. Rich lodes of silver discovered in Peru and Mexico were providing increased revenue for Charles I in his final years as monarch and, more importantly, for his heir Philip II during his long reign (1556–1598). While the era of conquest had not ended – especially on the northern frontier of New Spain and the southern frontier of Chile where warfare continued – the most spectacular triumphs were ever more distant memories for the few remaining conquistadors and early settlers.

Peninsulars continued to sail to the Indies, but increasingly after mid-century, they encountered both earlier emigrants and their descendants. Native sons and daughters soon outnumbered the European Spaniards and reduced their initial preeminence. A royal administrative structure attracted candidates from both sides of the Atlantic for its positions. The expansion of the regular clergy and the creation of an ecclesiastical hier-

archy offered even more opportunities. As part of the growing Church, convents in Mexico, Peru, and other locations provided native daughters with an alternative to marriage. Growth, however, provoked conflict as native sons sought first to enter religious orders and the secular clergy and then to lead them.