

Unification of spain

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Unification of Spain: the Good, the Bad, and the Really Ugly | Alexis Wilson |
The Europeans wanted to expand their minds and their wealth with what the “unknown” world had to “offer”. When I say offer, I mean what they could take and run with without consequence. The Europeans wanted to “expose” and “enlighten” the new world people with their religion. When I say “expose” and “enlighten”, I mean force the new world people to convert to Christianity or they would be slowly tortured to death or burned at the stake.

Portugal, one of the all mighty Iberian States, was in a hard-hitting competition with Spain, another Iberian State. According to the textbook, Portugal was losing manpower and resources needed to control a vast empire of three continents. Spain on the other hand, depleted their newfound wealth on wars and other unnecessary things when they should have been developing their economy (Wallbank et al. 482). Portugal and Spain were battling for greatness, immortality if you will. They would have done anything to get it, even if it meant eradicating peoples and their cultures.

Unfortunately, that was exactly what Portugal and Spain did. Spain and Portugal were trading across the “known” world. Spain exported olive oil, asparagus, conserved fish and more. That was how they received their funds and their power. The Iberian States had a general idea that there were more lands to discover and more money to make. So they set sail to discover and take over anything that were in their way, with their bibles in their pockets and swords in their hands, fueled by the desire of unthinkable wealth and power.

According to Juan Pimentel, Portugal and Spain entered the sixteenth century with an advantage in nautical technology and navigation relative to other European nations (20). "The overseas enterprises of Spain expanded dramatically following the first voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Even before this historic Atlantic crossing, Spaniards had begun the conquest of the Canary Islands which served as a base and proving ground for the invasion and conquest of Spanish America, known as the Indies" (Andrien 55).

Even though Christopher Columbus was not from Spain, he set sail for them because the King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain were the only ones that agreed to fund for the exploration that made Christopher Columbus famous, the exploration that Christopher Columbus dreamed of. "Spain became strongly centralized under an assertive and aggressive monarchy in 1479, when Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon began a joint rule that united the Iberian Peninsula except for Navarre, Portugal, and Granada" (Wallbank et al 455).

Portugal was known as incredible competition relative to Spain. Columbus wanted to prove that he could find a shorter and cheaper way to sail to India and China by taking the unknown west route. While Columbus was looking for a shorter route to reach the country of India and China, he inadvertently discovered America. Columbus was oblivious to the fact that he "discovered" America, and he did not reach his intended destination of India. Columbus called the inhabitants "Indians". He had his men capture the "Indians" and made them slaves.

When Columbus came to America he came with diseases. The inhabitants did not have a strong enough immune system to fight off, which decimated the inhabitants of America. Even though the people were sick, it is safe to say that Columbus did not show mercy and still made the slaves work so he would be able to bring gold, spices and other new world items he promised to the King and Queen of Spain, in high hopes that they would fund for more explorations. He did not wish to disappoint the very people that invested in him.

After “discovering” the diversity of the Indies, intellectuals of Spain argued over the humanity and proper social role of the indigenous people they have come to encounter and the offspring of the men that Columbus traveled and the women of the Americas. Intellectuals of Spain struggled with what to call the indigenous people and their illegitimate offspring. They were not sure whether or not to call them “beasts”, “barbarians”, or “brothers” (Andrien 59). Columbus, being the pocketful of sunshine he is, forced the inhabitants to convert to Christianity to ensure that the land was for Spain, all of Spain practiced one religion.

If the inhabitants did not agree to convert they severely punished, as mentioned before (Wallbank et al 482). The Catholic Majesties were smart to invest in Christopher Columbus. Without his exploration and “discoveries” of gold, silvers, spices and slaves, they would not have been able to replenish their wealth and rebuild the broken economy. Back in Spain, Isabella and Ferdinand is working on unifying Spain and sharing the crowns of Castile, Aragon and Spain (“History of Spain”). Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon planned on making Spain the best it has ever been.

They wanted their beloved country to be unified in everything they did, especially in religion. That is where the legendary Spanish Inquisition comes into action. The “ Catholic Majesties”, as the pope titled King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, set out to establish effective royal control in all of Spain. Isabella and Ferdinand started the Spanish Inquisition, for the pope allowed. Not only did they have power over Spain, they had power over the church also. They were able to have power over the church by making it the law for the monarchs of Spain to have power over the church.

The Spanish court of inquisition seized the property of many converters (Jews and Muslims who were afraid of the inquisition and avoided persecution) and terrified the Christian clergy and laity into accepting royal absolutism as well as religious orthodoxy (Wallbank et al 455). Not only did they force religion on the peoples of the new world, Isabella and Ferdinand forced religion on their own people as well, without mercy may I add. Spanish absolutism, defined by Isabella herself as “ one king, one law, one faith” (Wallbank et al 455).

Terrified but still determined to practice their faith, the “ converters” practiced their religion in secret. Without a doubt, the Spanish Inquisition strengthens the Spanish crown. It also caused many people to leave Spain. Inquisitors made sure the King and Queen of Spain knew that people were performing acts of heretic and suggested to the King and Queen of Spain all those who were unwilling to convert to Christianity must leave the country, needless to say they agreed and the Inquisitors went into action and rid the country of Spain of non-converters (Wallbank et al 455).

In 1492, the same year Columbus set out to sail to India and China, about 150,000 Spanish Jews left the country and resided in the Netherlands, England, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire (Wallbank et al 455). About 10 years later same demands are made for the Spanish Muslims. Spain used to be one of the most tolerant of religions, but under the rule of the "Catholic Majesties", Spain became the most intolerant country when it came to terms of religion ("History of Spain"). King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella did not stop there. They set out to clear surrounding countries of non-converters and expand their empire even more.

One of the most notable successes of the Catholic Majesties was the completion of the Reconquista with the defeat of Granada, the last Muslim state on the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. With a few more defeats of surrounding countries, the unification of the Spanish nation-state was complete in 1516, right before King Ferdinand died, a dozen years after Queen Isabella died (Wallbank et al 456). In my opinion, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella's policies did work for them in the long run, in every sense. Do I agree on how they executed their plans for progressing Spain? No, I absolutely do not agree with the Catholic Majesties tactics.

But, they reached every goal they set. Their goal was improving Spain and broadening their empire. With Isabella inheriting the crown of Castile and Ferdinand inheriting the crown of Aragon, the couple had a lot of power that made it possible for them to fully convert and unify their empire ("History of Spain"). In the textbook it explains that Ferdinand and Isabella controlled the church, with the grace of the Pope, and they took control of surrounding countries, rid them of non-converting heretics and converted them to

Christianity. King Ferdinand fought against the non-converters until his dying breath (Wallbank et al 456).

People lost their lives, their homes and the freedoms to express themselves and their religions because the King and Queen wanted to “unify” their country and empire. They wanted to do what the rulers before them were not able to do. They were rough and ruthless in a sense to achieve their goals of expanding their country and spreading their religion. They had to be if they wanted their country to be unified and practicing one religion. I guess it is safe to say that they would agree with Machiavelli’s renowned book *The Prince*. “It is better to be feared than to be loved...the end justifies the means”... (Machiavelli’s *The Prince*).

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