

Spain rise and fall



Before the 16th century, Spain was not recognized as a legitimate powerhouse in Europe. They were known as a very strong Catholic orientated country located in the Iberian Peninsula north of Morocco. However, in the matter of a p of little over a hundred years, Spain obtained a great amount of wealth and power through conquests and inheritance from the king. Just as they were the greatest empire in the world, it fell apart and soon declined into the status of a third-rate power in Europe.

King Charles V of Spain inherited many lands of Europe because of hisfamilybackground. In 1506, he had obtained the Burgundain Lands, which included the Low Countries and Flanders. He was also the grandson of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, the great two Spanish monarchs from the late 15th century. In 1516, he became the first monarch to rule a united Spain. He was not done yet. In 1519 he was granted the Habsburg domains in Austria. Not only that, but in 1530 he was named Holy Roman Emperor.

This meant that Charles V has control over the three leading dynasties of Europe at the time- the House of Habsburg of the Habsburg Monarchy, the House of Valois-Burgundy house of the Burgundian Netherlands, and the House of Trastamara of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon. This meant in Europe Charles V had control completly over the Central, Western, and Southern lands. No other monarch in Europe had as much land as Charles V had in the European continent. Not only did he have that land, but also from the Spanish conquests in the Americas and Asia, Charles V had the first global empire in the world.

His empire became very rich and powerful from those conquests and imported goods they received from those places. The Columbian Exchange

was the exchange of plants and animals from the Old World and the New World in which Spain and other empires successfully benefited from. From 1493, Columbus introduced horses, cattle, sheep, dogs, pigs, chicken, and goats. The rate at which these animals grew were spectacular, thus leading to more food for the Spanish population which gave them a population increase and more money flowing in because of the extra meats.

Not only that, but Spain brought back maize from Mexico, white potatoes from Peru, and various beans, squash, pumpkins, avocados, and tomatoes. Maize was a great gift for the Spanish because it was used as food for all peoples and livestock of the world. Since it gave a high yield per unit of land and a short growing season, it proved to be an especially important cash crop for them. The discovery of silver in the Americas was what really established Spain as the economic powerhouse of the world. In 1545, the Spanish discovered an enormous amount of silver in the city of Potosi.

When it was discovered, no one lived in Potosi. By 1600 however, 160, 000 people lived there. This made it about the size of the city of London at the time. Potosi yielded about 60 percent of all the world's silver mined in the world and made Spain very powerful and oh so rich once again. Another way the Spanish became successfully rich was from the slave trade. Their slave system was called the encomienda system, which was a legal form of slavery there. The Crown gave permission the conquerors the right to employ groups of Amerindians as agricultural or mining laborers.

However as soon as the rapid decline of Amerindian population followed, the Spanish turned to the black slaves of Africa. This started what soon called the Triangular Trade route. The ships were crammed and packed with

hundreds of captives in the boats in order for them to increase profits because the more slaves you had alive in your ship, the more money you received. However, the dominance of Spain proved to be temporary and short lived. Through the result of all the increase of the amount of food and land, it was no surprise that the population experienced a steady increase.

This also created a sharp rise in the demand of foods and goods throughout the empire. Since Spain had removed their best farmers and businessmen- the Muslims and the Jews- in the fifteenth century, the economy was suffering greatly and could not meet the new demands, so prices rose. As well as that, the cost of manufacturing cloth and other goods increased, and Spanish products were not able to compete with cheaper products made elsewhere in the international market. King Charles V was no longer king of Spain by 1556 because he was tired from he long decades of ruling the vast empire. Through his reign he spent time warring with the French and the Ottoman Empire throughout his reign. He also spent his time devoting his time to stamp out the Protestant Reformation. Thus, the throne was passed down to his son Phillip II. The main event and problem that crucially hit the Spanish Empire was the " British problem. " On 1586 Mary, Queen of Scots who was the cousin and heir of Elizabeth, became involved in a plot to assassinate her. This was for the hope for England to reunite with Catholic Europe.

Phillip fully supported the plot. Not long after, Mary was discovered and was beheaded on February 18, 1587. Phillip soon heard of the news and went after to conquer England. Conquering England promised the additional benefit of cutting off financial support to Dutch rebels since Spain was in a

bitter war with the Dutch at the time. Phillip's strategy was to prepare a vast fleet to sail from Lisbon to Flanders. They would fight off Elizabeth's navy if needed, rendezvous with the duke of Parma, and escort barges carrying Parma's troops across the English Channel.

On May 9, 1588 Phillip's fleet of 130 set sail from the Lisbon harbor. The fleet was part of the great Spanish Armada. The Armada met an English fleet in the Channel. The English ships were smaller but faster, allowing more maneuverability in the water. Many of the ships had greater firing power than the Armada ships. The combination of storms, spoiled food and rank water, lacking ammunition, and the scattering of the Spanish ships from the English fire ships gave England victory. The Armada was defeated even before they reached the Netherlands.

On the way back, many other ships went down near Ireland and about 65 of the ships were able to make it back home. The defeat of the Armada prevented Phillip II from re-imposing religious unity on Western Europe by force. He unfortunately did not conquer England, and Elizabeth continued with her financial and military support of the Dutch. In 1609, Phillip III of Spain (r. 1598-1621) agreed to a truce. This truce recognized the independence of the United Provinces. In the seventeenth-century, memory of the loss of the Spanish Armada contributed to a spirit of defeatism.

It was all set and done in little over a century. Spain had completed its epic collapse from being the global empire of the world, to now being a third-rate power in the seventeenth-century. Spain obtained a great amount of wealth and power through conquests and inheritance from the king in the sixteenth-century. Just as they were the greatest empire in the world, it all fell apart

and soon declined into the status of a third-rate power in Europe. In all, we can see how things can quickly change from being outstanding to disastrous.