

# Colonial empires of the americas: the spanish empire essay sample

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The Spanish established colonial empire in the Americas in the 16th Century in parts of South, North and Central America; a region that later became known as the Latin America. Its empire was among the first and largest global empires in the world. Its territories spanned the Americas, Asia, Oceania, Europe, and Africa between the 15th centuries until the late 19th Centuries, with several other colonial empires in Africa in the late 20th century (Mills, Taylor, & Graham). In 1492, Spain began as one united monarch after the Iberian Peninsula was Reconquista. A Spanish voyager, Christopher Columbus, commanded an exploratory voyage from Spain across the Atlantic into today's America; this is what led to the discovery of America. Apparently, this new discovery by Christopher Columbus, the America, became the focus of most explorations and voyages at the time (Wood).

In this new age of discovery so the Spanish begin settling in the conquistadors and the Caribbean islands which they soon controlled, including native empires such as the Incas and the Aztecs on Americas mainland (The Ancient Worlds). These expeditions later established a territory that spanned from North America through present day Canada to South America in a place referred to as Tierra del Fuego. The expeditions by the Spanish were started by Magellan Ferdinand in the 1500s, specifically, around 1519. They were, however, completed in 1522 by Juan Sabastian Elcano. It is argued that what Christopher Columbus had longed for, a westward sea route to Asia, which aroused Spain's attention to the Far East, was completed by this man, Juan Sabastian Elcano. Spain later established colonies in the Philippines, a region referred to as Guam, and the

surrounding islands.

The geographic stretch of the Spanish colonial empire began with the expeditions and the explorations carried out by Christopher Columbus in the late 15th century; Spain took advantage of these new discoveries and developed an empire in the new world. Its empire extended through the Americas, and later into Asia by the 16th Century. The Spanish empire was divided into three major viceroyalties, which included New Castile, New Spain and New Granada.

Having acquired and conquered large territories, the Spanish monarch became the first monarch to be faced with the problem and challenge of administering a large territory on the West side of the Atlantic Ocean. However, careful and appropriate measures had already been taken from the beginning to help with this difficult situation that was emerging. As early as 1493, Christopher Columbus second expedition, Isabella and Ferdinand began building an administration through, Juan Rodriguez de Fonseca, their personal chaplain (Sweet & Nash).

The enormous empire that the Spanish had built lasted for more than 300 years and encountered a myriad of changes. Communications were very slow, rules were rigid and were more often than not always ignored, and numerous layers of bureaucracy existed. The mainstay of the Spanish empire's economy was silver, which was more than the gold that the empire produced in Mexico and in Peru.

The Spanish empire society was divided into three states or social classes, with the lowest being the commoners, followed by the clergy, then the nobility. Corporate bodies also existed such as the military orders,

universities, and towns with their own legal entitlements. The nobles or nobilities were excused from direct taxation. In fact, those people who were aspiring top noble men subverted to the status and privileges that were conferred on them. The crown began selling patents for nobility in the 1520s.

## **The Portuguese Empire**

Among the global empires in history, the Portuguese Empire was the strongest. In the 16th Century, Portuguese conquered and dominated Brazil with territories in various parts of South America, South Asia, India, South East Asia, and India. Apparently, the Portuguese empire was also one of the longest lived amongst all other European colonial empires such as the French, British and the Spanish empires. The Portuguese had global ambitions, which began when they began exploring the coast of Africa around 1419 when they successfully conquered Ceuta, the North African City in 1415 (Mills). The Portuguese used the latest developments in cartography, maritime, and navigation technology to find a sea route that would lead them to the source of the spice trade, which was at the time very lucrative. The Portuguese occupied the Iberian Peninsula on the western part, which was slightly smaller than Indiana. Its continent was crossed by three major rivers that flowed from Spain into the Atlantic. The country was divided by this river into three major geographical regions. Part of the northern boundary, the Minho River cut through the mountains and extended into the area around the Douro River.

In 1889, King Carlos, who was very corrupt, rose into power and made a close friend and confidant of his, João Franco, the Prime Minister in 1906. He gave him dictatorial powers. However, the Premier, João Franco and his sons

were in 1908, shot dead in Lisbon. Portugal's new King, Manoel II, was later dethroned in the 1910 revolution, which made Portugal a French like republic. The Portuguese were traditionally allied to the British, and as such fought with the Allied in Africa during the World War I and on the Western Front, as well. On January 1986, Portugal was admitted to the EEC, the European Economic Community

## **The French Empire**

These were the colonial territories of the French that were under the rule of the French outside Europe from as early as the 1600s until the late 1960s. The French colonial empire was, by the 19th century, the second largest after the British Empire in the world. This empire spanned over 4 million square miles geographically (Pagden). It was located in the Alps near the Swiss and the Italian borders at Mont Blanc, Europe's highest point. The Great French Empire, between 1804 and 1814, the Napoleonic Empire was led by the Great Napoleon I. It is considered as the most powerful and the most dominant in the continental Europe in 19th Century.

The French influence of most parts of the Western Europe was extended into Poland and other parts of Western Europe following subsequent military victories of the Napoleonic wars. Around the 1800s, the French empire had established more than 125 departments and ruled over 44 million subjects. It maintained military presence in Spain, Germany, Duchy of Warsaw, and Italy; at the same time, it could consider Austria and Prussia as its allies.

## **The British/English Empire**

The colonization of the Americas by the British began as early the 1700s, before it reached its peak, at a time when colonies were established all over the Americas and the establishment of protectorate over the Hawaiian Kingdom in the Pacific (Sweet & Nash, 1991). The British American Empire was one of the most important and, in fact, rivaled the Spanish American empire in economic and military might. The conquest by the British resulted in dramatic upheavals on the indigenous population due to their direct military force and their indirect cultural disruptions, which led to a myriad of diseases. The British Empire began in the 1497 when an Italian voyager John Cabot in the service of King Henry VII, sailed across the Atlantic and reached the Americas, the Newfoundland. Around 1583, Sir Humphrey, another explorer took the Newfoundland in possession on behalf of Queen Elizabeth I (Sweet & Nash, 1991). this was at a time when the Spanish and the Portuguese had considerably subdivided amongst themselves part of the Earth's surface. England was at the time a reputable force in the seas, however, its seafarers were mostly freebooters who were more engaged in slavery, piracy and trade.

There were several domestic industries already flourishing with most workers participating in dual occupations in both agriculture and industry. As opposed to most western countries, the English society had extensive and more flourishing middling sector. This gave it a strong platform for commerce, especially in terms of settlement, in faraway territories. In the 18th century, the British Empire became the most dominant among the trading empires in Europe (Taylor).

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