**Latin American Transition from 1520 to 1620**

Colonial times in the new world were filled with progress and advancement in addition to many massive changes that would alter the way its inhabitants would live in years to come. After the defeat and surrender of the Mexica and Incans, the Spanish began to settle in and live more comfortably. The defeat did not come easy and took its toll on both sides; through battle, illness, treason, starvation and many other difficulties, both sides needed to rebuild in a way that either would force cohabitation or the complete loss of the native civilizations. To analyze the transition from the first phase of Latin American colonization in 1560 into the second phase in 1620, one must delve into several topics of interest. Four primary areas of focus must be addressed and will include political, economic, religious, and social changes brought about during these times of transition.

Before colonization, South America was broken into numerous civilizations, both small and large, each having their own political structures. Upon Spanish invasion and settlement the lands began a process I can only describe as unification. As the Spanish moved into their newfound territories and spread across the Americas some form of political system had to be implemented in order to push the Spanish agenda. This agenda was more or less focused on two aspects –religion, and making money. Spain quickly realized it would not be possible for the king to rule from 3000 miles overseas so it decided to appoint a group of people to manage the New World from Spain. This group was called the Council of the Indies and would guide the maturation of the new lands. To deal with the difficulties of governing a land so far away, it was decided that the new territory would be broken up into viceroyalties. From within these sectors viceroys would rule during a short term in office and was given a wide array of powers. Personally I like this system as the high turnover rate would keep corruption at a minimum seeing as though there were time restrictions. Local administration changed in great ways. Originally conquistadores would govern their lands, but upon colonization and formal government structure implementation, the wealthiest of the families were selected to rule. These people would make many manor decisions. This wasn’t a great move in the long run as it seemed to divide the citizens and formed what I would consider a cast system. Overall I believe the political structure was very hierarchical and well laid out, but the selection and appointment of officials would eventually push the lands to turmoil as opinion of governing practices falters and the lowest class don’t have the ability to set forth a movement to change them as they would like.

When talking about economies, the New World had a very interesting setup. Originally starting out as individual empires producing goods and bartering, the new Spanish system would soon override this and start a new method of making money. When the conquistadores first came to the lands they were given titles to the land and told to use it as they needed through the encomienda system. Spain didn’t expect much to come out of these areas in the beginning so this seemed like the best thing to do. It became apparent that it wouldn’t work so Spain decided to lift the encomienda system after it became a race to conquer lands and enslave the Indians. As we near the second phase of colonization, the New Laws were passed and the Indians could no longer be exploited for economic gain. This is the best decision they could have made in my opinion; when enslaved I would not imagine that they would have done their best work, though when free and paid, theoretically the economic gain should increase! Spain wanted the gold and silver from the new world as a source of money; as time progressed the mining operations were ramped up and silver production increased. Most importantly, trade was becoming a bigger factor in the economic progress of New Spain. To produce the goods, workers were needed and so many died of disease early on that African slaves were brought in to do the work for the Spanish. Overall I don’t see much in the way of shocking economic progress or advancements, and it seems to be rudimentary at best requiring slave labor and being restricted to local trade due to the distance from Spain.

From a religious standpoint the primary goal did not change over time, converting the natives to Christianity. From the day Columbus stepped foot on the lands this was one of two items on the metaphorical to-do list. Conversions to Catholicism were forced, and honestly I was not surprised when the natives would lapse back to their own beliefs. To deal with this, harsh punishments were designed instill fear in the converted and prevent relapse. Documents were destroyed, making the last remaining religious knowledge of the empires reside with the elders. Though the initial conversions were difficult, it became easier as the generations progressed and the knowledge of non Christian religions fade. Another way to ease the conversion was implemented by the church, making the documents available in the natives own language. This caused the formation of many smaller groups of specialized versions of Catholicism across the lands. The biggest problem faced on the religious front was Spain’s own fear of non-conversion. As time went on, paranoia set in and the Spanish imposed hardh punishments on those who wouldn’t convert or those who went back to their old religions. They also looked for people who were hiding that they were of Muslim or Jewish faith, though this is a European problem, not a New World one. Lastly, accusations of religious rebellion were extremely common as the accused were guilty until proven innocent so the accusers benefited by taking their lands and belongings. Honestly I believe this topic held the lands back and caused unnecessary turmoil in the New World.

Finally from a social standpoint, there wasn’t much great change that was solely social. Although there was progress on this front, it wasn’t as drastic. The Spanish lifestyle was essentially brought to the Americas and the Natives social structure was wiped out through war and disease. This made it easy for the Spanish to make the lands their home and integrate the small number of remaining natives into their society. The family and hierarchical aspect of society was similar to that of Spain, celebrations and events were also carried over. From what I recall, none, or a very small amount of the native’s culture remained, and as the new generations arrived and matured, they began to integrate better into the Spanish lifestyle. Overall, I didn’t find the social aspect that interesting as most of the natives lifestyle was destroyed by the Spanish and disease killed off the elderly that was most familiar with their native ways making a perfect opportunity to “drop” in the Spanish social structures.

The New World has undergone numerous massive changes throughout its history. From the natives governing their own areas and producing goods, to the Spanish invasion, essentially wiping them off the face of the earth, the process was long and grueling. The Spanish set forth to control the area and implemented one of the most interesting political structures I’ve studied so far. From an economic standpoint, I did not see much that really awed me, but it was beginning to mature and become diversified by the beginning of the second stages of colonization. Societally, many potential ethical issues arise and the culture matures in a very guided way. Overall, the difference between the stages of colonization was great, but I believe many aspects of the new society held it back, especially from a religious standpoint due to the conflict caused by Spain’s paranoia.