**The Spanish Empire: 1450-1750**

1450 – 1750 PERIOD When Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean Sea in 1492 he changed the lives of the Native populations in massive ways. The Spanish claimed the American lands as their territory and began to set up colonies throughout Latin America.

The global economy truly became global once the American continents were included. The COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE was a major effect of Columbus’ discovery. The exchange included animals, plants, and diseases between the Americas and Europe. The Spanish set up Latin America into numerous plantations. These plantations needed large labor supplies. At first, Native Americans were forced to work on plantations, but they soon succumb to disease. De la Casas, a priest, suggested that the Spanish import slaves from Africa since they did not die from European diseases. The largest number of slaves from Africa was sent to Latin America.

In addition to agriculture, the Spanish began mining for gold and silver (Mexico and Peru). The amount of silver mined from Spain was so great that the final of silver in Europe declined. Native Americans worked in mines until African slaves began to replace them. Mines were owned privately, but they had to send 20% to the Spanish government.

The Spanish in Latin America led to an exchange of culture that hadn’t been seen since the Roman and Islamic Empires. The Spanish language, religion (Catholicism), and social structure were spread to both the Natives of Latin America and the immigrants who arrived.

The social and labor system in Latin America was called the Encomienda System. The institution was much in decline by the 1620s. Despite the disappearance of the encomienda, the royal government continued to exact Indian labor as a form of taxation, the mita. During the seventeenth century, Indians began to leave villages and seek private employment as a means of avoiding government labor requirements.

The Portuguese also sought land in the Americas and they were guaranteed Brazil in the Line of Demarcation (Treaty of Tordesillas). Brazil’s economy was based upon sugar and mining. They also used slaves for the majority of their labor needs.

There was great competition between Brazil and the Caribbean in the sugar market. To ensure that there were enough slaves for Brazil, Portugal outlawed slavery within the country of Portugal.

SOCIAL AND GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM

The Viceroys ruled the Spanish colonies. He was both the administrative and the military leader of the colony. He collected taxes and performed the duties of judges.

The multi-ethnicity of Latin America was the most diverse in the world. First social structure did exist that greatly limited some people. The system that emerged was:

• Peninsulares – those born in Europe

• Creoles – those born in the Americas, but to European parents; the lack of status and rights for this group led to dissent and eventual rebellion

• Mestizoes and other mixed race individuals were at the bottom of the structure.

• Women did have rights in dowry, inheritance, and some access to commerce.