**Encomienda**

**I. Inroduction**

Hernan Cortes was the first **conquistador**, conqueror/adventurer, to conquer a group of people in Latin America. Hernando Cortes conquered the Aztecs and their emperor, Montezuma. He managed to convince Montezuma, the Aztec ruler, to allow him into his capital city. However, as soon as he entered the city, Cortes immediately took Montezuma captive. The Aztec priests tried to fight back against the Spaniards, leading Cortes to execute Montezuma. Cortes’s army lost the battle and they had to leave the city. It was not long before they returned with 800 more soldiers and 25,000 native allies. They turned the once-mighty city into a pile of rubble. The Aztecs finally surrendered in 1521. By 1550, they conquered the rest of the Yucatan Peninsula.

**II. Christianity**

The Spanish explorers believed that their mission was to convert the natives to Christianity. The **missionaries** (church officials) who came to the New World to spread the Catholic religion were often more kind and charitable than the brutal conquistadors. Often, the native people incorporated (combined) Catholic traditions with their own traditional beliefs. However, native religious symbols, signs and items of art could be considered anti-Christian and was often destroyed by the Spanish missionaries. For these reasons, the cultures of Native American peoples were completely changed by the European takeover.

**III. The Encomienda System**

In Latin America, the Spanish conquerors were “given” large amounts of land (haciendas) as well as a certain number of Native slaves. Under this **Encomienda system**, people were divided into social classes based on birth.

**Directions: Using the documents and pyramid, answer the questions below.**

**DOCUMENT 1:**

… Growing sugar cane became a large business. At first, Native Americans were forced to work on sugar plantations, large estates run by an owner or overseer. They were treated cruelly, and many died. The Spanish then brought slaves from Africa to do the work. A new social structure developed. People born in Spain made up the highest social class. Those of European descent born in the colonies were next. People of mixed European and Indian or African descent were in the middle. Native Americans and people of African descent were in the lowest classes.… Source: *Guide to the Essentials of World History*, Prentice Hall



**According to the document 1 (quote and photo), what was the purpose of the encomienda system?**

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**DOCUMENT 2:**

…The West Indian experience from the time of Columbus’ first voyage was one of Indian labor for Spanish masters. When this labor was not given “voluntarily” it was extracted by force. As Spaniards arrived in increasing numbers, the need for labor became more pressing, and the burden upon Indian manpower progressively more severe. Spaniards raided Indian communities, took captives, and, in order to prevent escape or to ensure the full measure of work, practiced large-scale enslavement. Columbus, at first, appears to have made some attempt to regulate (control) this forced labor, but without appreciable [noticeable] success. In general the first Spanish contacts with the natives of America followed the precedent (pattern) of European contact with the natives of Africa, and the practicality and legitimacy of enslavement were everywhere assumed.… Source: Charles Gibson, *Spain in America*, Harper Torchbooks (adapted)

**According to Charles Gibson, what is his perspective of the Spanish and their treatment of the Indian community?**

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… In response to both his fear and conscience, Charles promulgated [instituted] the New Laws in 1542. They forbade (did not allow) the enslavement of the Indians, their compulsory (required) personal service, the granting of new encomiendas, and the inheritance of encomiendas. More positively they declared the Indians to be free persons, vassals of the crown, and possessed of their own free will. The colonists protested vehemently [passionately]. Rebellion threatened Mexico; in Peru encomenderos [holders of encomiendas] rose up to defy the law. Once again under extreme pressure, the monarch modified some of the laws and revoked others. Still, although the encomienda would continue for some time in parts of the sprawling American empire, the king had checked [limited] it. After the mid-sixteenth century the institution waned [faded away]. The state [Spanish monarchy] exerted even greater control over the declining Indian population.… Source: E. Bradford Burns, *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History*, Prentice Hall (adapted)

**How did the encomienda system change over time? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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**African Slaves:** African slaves performed all of the hard labor for the colonists.

 **Mulattos:** Mulattos were mixed blood of African slaves and Europeans. They rarely ever mixed with Creoles or Peninsulares. Mulattos took a slightly higher place in society because they were not purely slave.

**Native Americans:** Unlike enslaved Africans, Native Americans were of little economic value to the Spaniards because they often became sick with the diseases brought over by Europeans. As a result they were more severely oppressed than any other group.

**Peninsulares**: Peninsulares were “pure blood” men who had been born in Spain. They were granted ***haciendas***, large estates, where they could grow crops, raise cattle and other farm animals for sale of products/trade. Only Peninsulares could hold high office in the Spanish colonial government and Catholic Church.

**Mestizos:** Mestizos were persons of mixed European and Native American ancestry, so they had some “pure blood”, which made them above any “non-pure blood” person. Many mestizos were working class people, such as servants and manual laborers.

**Creoles**: Creoles were of “pure Spanish blood”, but born in Latin America, not Spain. Creoles could not hold high positions in the government, but they could serve in colonial armies and become military officers. They also owned most of the plantations, ranches, and mines, but were not granted haciendas.