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The Expectation from the Spanish and Portuguese Governments on their American Colonies

In the New World, The Spanish and the Portuguese governments had specific expectations for the behavior of their subjects. While the Spanish colonized most of the western side of South America and the Portuguese colonized Brazil, they had very different expectations for their subjects. The Spanish clarified that they wanted their American colonies to be similar to Spain, with the indigenous people assimilating the Spanish culture and customs and practicing Catholicism. However, the Portuguese were more lenient on how they expected the behavior to be in Brazil; they focused more on the financial and exportation side of the colony and cared more about that aspect than the social aspect of the colony. With the specific expectations from the Spanish, their subjects struggled to comply with their demands. However, the Portuguese were more lenient, so they experienced little pushback from their subjects to comply with their wishes.

The Spaniards focused more on conversion and finding gold in the American Colonies. The Spanish conquered indigenous empires like the Aztec Empire in Mexico City and the Inka Empire in Peru. With the control of those empires, they used the Indigenous groups as forced laborers to build the infrastructure and institutions they wanted to develop in their new colonies. With their new lands, they had many expectations and demands for their new subjects. The expectation they had for the Indigenous population was complete submission. They demanded that all their subjects assimilate into their customs and religion and relinquish all they knew with

their traditions, customs, and religion. With that, the conquistadors did not receive any land or riches, except for Hernán Cortés, and conquered lands without the hope of getting tangible riches. The Indigenous populations did not comply with all the demands forced onto them. Many completed their forced labor but did not comply with relinquishing their customs and religion. Many natives practiced syncretism, combined their traditional beliefs with the Christian God, and used both religions to appeal to the Spanish without losing their indigenous identities. The Spanish, especially the priests, did not condone this situation, but there was no way to completely stop them from practicing their religion.

The situation was very different from the Spanish in the Portuguese colony of Brazil. Since there were not any established indigenous empires in Brazil, the Portuguese did not have issues with conquering Brazil. Brazil is a big colony in South America, but the Amazon Forest and dry backlands of Brazil made it hard for the Portuguese to settle there. Due to this, the government of Portugal was giving incentives to people willing to travel overseas and help with colonization. They offered the role of Capitánias to those who wished to help establish Brazil by giving them a title and land in the colony. The main focus of this colony was exportation and financial gain for the Portuguese government, and they needed workers to build their export. Due to this, the Portuguese became involved in the Slave Trade, and the population of Africans in Brazil was the largest compared to other American colonies. With the help of the enslaved people, Brazil started a vast production of sugar and exported it to other countries like Great Britain for money. Due to the importance of financial gain, the Portuguese government did not necessarily tightly control Brazil. They were content as long as they were making money but expected their subjects to live in Brazil as they would in Portugal with the same rules and

customs. Though slavery was more prevalent in the Portuguese colony compared to the Spanish, the freedom of minorities and females fluctuated.

Minorities and females had a more strict lifestyle in Spain or Portugal than in their American colonies. For the Spanish colonies, women could gain power and influence through the church and commit to a holy and righteous life as nuns or lay sisters. Lay sisters or Beata are women who take religious vows but do not live in a covenant. A famous Beata turned saint named Santa Rosa of Lima “was one of some fifty-five people canonized by the Catholic Church between 1588 and 1767” (Taylor 199). She was known for her practice of mortification of the flesh and wore a beaded belt around her body to keep herself holy, and the righteous life she lived gave her popularity and fame. Many covenants became a place of power and influence, like the Covenant of Santa Clara in Cuzco, Peru. They became a massive influence in Cuzco as they lent money to the community there, giving them leverage and importance in their societies. Therefore, Spanish women could live more freely in the colonies than in Spain and were even given influence in the colonies.

However, in Brazil, women did not need to be involved in the church to gain influence, but the treatment of racial minorities was different compared to other places. In the American colonies, there were races of the colonizers, Indians, Africans, and Mulattos, and it caused racial hierarchy. Brazilian society was composed of all those mixes. Unlike other societies, Blacks could interact with White Portuguese, but slavery was still present, and there was still uncertainty about Blacks’ place in Portuguese society. However, “when the slaves carried out their arduous duties for weeks on end, they [were] allowed to celebrate one Sunday as they pleased” (Taylor 164), which is rare in other colonies. Though they were allowed to choose one Sunday for relaxation, they were still tightly controlled by their owners and were subjected

to inhumane treatment and brutal punishments. Due to the harsh living conditions, Brazil had a sizable fugitive slave population, and many fugitive slaves established fortified settlements in the dry backlands. The different races in Brazil had more harmonious relationships and interactions than in other countries and colonies. However, there was still a racial hierarchy, with the white Portuguese on top and the Africans at a lower status.

With all the changes in the colonies, the Spanish and Portuguese governments had to eventually check in on the colonies to make sure their behavioral expectations were being met by their subjects. For the Spanish, they sent priests to make sure that Catholic conversions were occurring and that the indigenous groups were complying with their rules. The church even instituted the Inquisition in their American colonies for a few months to punish those who were not complying and to use fear to make them obey. For the Portuguese, with the devastation of an earthquake in Portugal, the government believed God was punishing them for their moral failings. Therefore, the government took a more active hand in how Brazil ran and its subjects behaved. They established a check-in and surveillance system to ensure taxes were collected and people were behaving in a socially acceptable way. They also punished those who wished to resist their laws and demands. Both countries established laws and surveillance to ensure their colonies were running the way they wanted.

Overall, The Spanish and Portuguese governments went about colonizing and running their colonies differently. However, they expected the rules and behaviors of the homeland society to be the same in their American colonies. They had many demands and expectations of their subjects that were often met and discarded by those in the colonies. Though women were given more freedom and power in Spanish colonies, in Brazil, women and minorities were tightly controlled by the government and their owners and were not given as

much freedom. The behavior of the Spanish and Portuguese Subjects was eventually put into check through laws, surveillance, and people of the church.

Work Cited

William B. Taylor, Sandra Lauderdale Graham, Kenneth Mills, eds. *Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History* (Wilmington, De.: Scholarly Resources, 2002).