**The Spanish Colonial System**

**Directions: Read the following excerpt. As you read…**

1. **Make connections to what “absolutist” policies were practiced in the New World.**
2. **What similarities do you see with other European governments at the time?**
3. **What problems do you anticipate will come in Latin America in the future – be specific.**

The governing system always faced the following problems:

The distance between Spain and the New World encouraged the evasion of orders. The ordinary problems of human ambition came into play; the colonists often thwarted the Crown. The wealth of some parts of the empire meant that many people were trying to get wealth and cared little for the empire.

**Generalizations**

1. There were differences among colonies as to wealth. New Spain was wealthy whereas Paraguay was poor, for example.

2. The Crown enterprise in Spanish America was huge and spent a lot of money.

3. There were restrictions in terms of office; the Crown did not like to keep people in office too long. It wanted to keep officials from getting too embedded in local areas.

4. The Spanish mixed legislative, judicial, and executive functions. There was no thought of the separation of power.

5. The Crown tried to keep the ultimate authority in Spain, e.g. the use of the residencia. Spain was the court of last appeal. The Crown encouraged direct communication from colonists, making a great virtue out of this. It encouraged American officials to spy on each other. Some did.

6. The Crown gave a very large degree of independence to revenue officials such as the assayer, accountant, and treasurer. The Viceroy could not really control the royal officials.

7. The system had numerous guarantees against "Americanism." It used peninsulares (Spaniards born in Spain) as opposed to criollos (Spaniards born in a colony) in the great offices. Peninsulares were in the majority in inferior offices too. The Crown assumed that the peninsulares were intrinsically more loyal.

8. Spain had the alliance of ecclesiastical and civil administrations which was characteristic of the modern national dynastic state. The monarchs got control of the church through the patronado, which gave them control of major appointments of church officials and control over Church revenues. The Crown used this power to bolster its own authority. The Church did tremendous amount to help civil administration control this vast area. It demanded obedience to authority. It pacified the Indians.

9. The system practiced thought control, asserting homogeneity in religious and civil matters.

10. Spain used mercantilism for its economic policy. Mercantilism was based on the belief that only precious metals (principally gold and silver) were wealth and, thus, the way to increase wealth was to acquire more precious metals through warfare, theft, and trade. In trade, the ideal was to supply one's own needs and wants from within a one’s own closed system while selling goods to others outside that system.

11. It was policy to control the conquistadores. The Crown took take most of their political power while leaving them economic power. The claim of being a conquistador was recognized by the king as reason for favors but the Crown would not allow rivals to its power.

12. The whole system of control was held together by paperwork, documentary cement, a veritable flood of documents. There was too much to keep track of and it caused a tremendous amount of lying.

**Ways to Categorize the System**

1. The political-military system. This included administration, courts, officialdom, the tax system, and the militia.

2. The economic system. It was part of the whole system of control. It was part of the way to hold the empire together, to favor Spain and the upper classes. The economic system enormously reduced the ability of the lower classes to attack the system.

3. The ecclesiastical system.

4. The social system. This was part of the others. It included the system of noble titles, legal class divisions, censorship, and the educational system. The role of criollos was very restricted. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this was not as important an issue for criollos as it would become after the middle of the eighteenth century. All of the European settled areas were governed by these institutions. There are examples of illegal institutions such as the King of the Mosquitoes and Palmares in Brazil but these are unusual. Castas (non-European people, either mixed or non-mixed) were excluded from government service except for a few town councils or cabildos. Caciques (Indian leaders) did serve on occasion. The great changes in European philosophy of the 17th and the 18th centuries did not affect the Spanish world much. The eighteenth century Enlightenment heard a little bit more lightly in America but not until after 1750. Colonial ideas were conservative except, where, they met unknown situations such as the how to deal with Indians.