Social Structure and Social Change in New Spain

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THE PURPOSE of this paper is to examine the social structure of New Spain using a conceptual framework somewhat different from those commonly employed and one which may be more useful for the explanation of certain historical phenomena. It does not purport to be a piece of "basic research." It is more properly a theory of social structure. The principal concepts employed are abstracted from infinitely complex historical situations. A number of observations made cannot be precisely documented; they are hypotheses which seem to "make sense" in the light of the author's reading and research. Hypotheses and substantiated observations, however, appear to fit together and to accommodate the known "facts." The concept of society is arbitrarily separated from that of the state and the latter treated only incidentally, although Spanish political thinkers did not regard such boundary establishment as either real or desirable, and the political role of estates and corporations is factored out. This procedure can be justified by regarding the state as "nothing more than the organization of all social forces that have a political significance . . . as that part of society which performs the political function."[1] Conceptually, therefore, state and society may be distinguished one from the other and the problem of the relationship between the two, while real and important, is somewhat different from the one to be examined here.[2]

A word is in order about terminology. Such expressions as social structure, social organization, social system, class, caste, and the like are used rather loosely by historians, so that confusion in terminology often produces confusion in ideas. On the other hand, sociologists and social anthropologists in attempting to define such concepts more rigorously have come up with so many conflicting "scientific" definitions that they have simply created terminological confusion at

another level. The term "social structure" is here used in a non-technical sense. It presumes that a society is made up of individuals grouped according to the possession of common interests, attributes, and qualities; that these groups are definable, and that they are related to each other in some definable, non-random order.[3]   Other terms commonly used in social analysis are either explicitly defined or, it is hoped, their usage is implicit in the context.

On the eve of the conquest of America, the constituent elements of Spanish society were groups and associations identifiable in terms of (1) ascribed functions and/or statuses, (2) systems of shared values, attitudes, and activities associated with the latter, (3) distinct and unequal juridical personalities expressed in general legal codes or special *fueros, ordenanzas,* and *reglamentos,* and involving some degree of autonomous jurisdiction. This society was conceived of in organic terms; that is, like the human body, its several parts were structurally and functionally interrelated and interdependent. The health of the body social depended on the vigor and proper functioning of the constituent organs.

The constituent elements of Spanish society fell into two logical categories:[4] the vestiges of the medieval estates and functional corporations. The primary estates, noble, clerical, and common, had a functional derivation. Thus, in the High Middle Ages they were identified as *defensores, oratores,* and *laboratores.* Leaving aside the church for the moment, as between the two secular estates the function of warrior was assigned a higher social value and initially was completely identified with the nobility. Despite isolated voices upholding the dignity and value of production, it was commonly held that without the defensores, the other estates would fall victim to predatory forces and the social order would disintegrate. Function and its assigned social value conveyed social quality and status and conferred or withheld honor. Thus the bearing of arms was honorable while productive occupations—agriculture, trade, manufacturing—were dishonorable. Quality and honor, moreover, came to be conceived of not as individual attributes which could be acquired but as deriving from lineage. The military function of the nobility and derivative social quality and status were juridically recognized in the *fuero de hidalguía* whereby the noble was exempted from personal taxes and

[3] See the remarks on social structure in Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (London, 1955), pp. xiii-xiv.
[4] The following discussion of Spanish social structure, except where otherwise indicated, is based on Juan Beneyto, *Historia social de España y de Hispano-américa* (Madrid, 1961) and Jaime Vicens Vives, dir. and contr., *Historia social y económica de España y América* (4 vols. Barcelona, 1957-59), vol. II.

tributes (*pechos*); he could not be imprisoned for debt nor could his residence, horse, or arms be attached for debts, and he could not be subjected to judicial torture or to base punishment.[5]

Within the primary estates, hierarchies of social rank existed. Thus the highest level of the nobility consisted of the grandees who were the social equals of the king. Below them ranked the rest of the titled nobility—marquises, counts, etc.—and at the bottom of the pyramid of nobility was the mass of knights or hidalgos.

Coincidentally with the evolution of a hierarchy of estates and subestates, countertrends were deforming its structural purity. These had their origin in the growth of towns, trade, and a money economy. They assumed the form of increased diversification of function and the modification of the functional base of the secular estates. Within the common estate, an emerging group of merchants, bankers, and legalists (*letrados*) performed functions so indispensable to society and the state that they could not be denied social honor and status. In the case of mercantile elements, wealth could literally buy many of the attributes of social quality. Moreover, when city dwellers organized urban militia and the *Santa Hermandad* for their defense, and as the nucleus of a mercenary army developed in the fifteenth century, the nobility lost its monopoly on the role of defensor. At the same time, the pressures of a money economy reduced many of the lower strata of the nobility to indigency or compelled them into money-making activities. Hidalguía, furthermore, acquired an economic value. The hidalgo as distinct from the commoner (in this case identical with the *pechero*) was exempt from personal taxes or tributes, and pretensions to hidalguía came to be based not so much on aspirations to honor or status but on financial advantage. Conversely, the emergent bourgeoisie were anxious to acquire a social quality and status which could not be validated completely by wealth alone. Juan Huarte de San Juan describes these attitudes in his *Examen de ingenios*: "To be well born and of famous lineage is a very highly esteemed jewel but it has one very great fault; by itself it has little benefit . . . but linked to wealth there is no point of honor that can equal it . . . ." "Some" he adds, "compare nobility to the zero of the decimal system; by itself it is nothing but joined with a digit it acquires great value."[6]

As a consequence of these complementary trends, the traditional hierarchy of estates and subestates became blurred at the point of contact between the lower nobility and the upper strata of the common

[5] *Novísima recopilación de las leyes de España*, Lib. V, tit. ii, ley xv.
[6] As quoted in Beneyto, p. 215.

order and a new sector emerged which combined the values and
functions of the nobility and the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless the image
of a society ordered on the basis of functionally derived social quality
remained virtually unimpaired in the minds of Spaniards. Jurists
and theologians might challenge the system on philosophical, religious,
or logical grounds, but any popular opposition to it that existed arose
from dissatisfaction of individuals and groups with their place in it
rather than from a realization of its inequity.

Examined on another plane, the constituent elements of Spanish
society were a multitude of functional corporations which included
the army, merchant's guilds (*consulados*), artisan's guilds (*gremios*),
municipal organs, the *mesta*, and the like, each with a special juridical
status. The relationship between the estates and the corporations
raises a number of conceptual problems, the most fundamental being
whether they actually represented two distinct systems of social
organization. Beneyto observes that the corporate theory supported
the stability of social stratification in that "the status of the corpora-
tion has to correspond to the status of the individuals who enter into
it," implying that the corporations were actually suborders within
a stratified society of estates.[7] However, a case for the coexistence of
two social systems can be made on the following grounds: (1) Within
the estates, the ordering came to be on the basis of social quality and
status divorced from their original functional bases whereas the cor-
porations were specifically functional in fact and by virtue of their
formal ordenanzas and reglamentos. (2) The boundaries between
corporations in contrast to those separating social classes were sharp
and absolutely definable in functional and legal terms. (3) Although
there was some general correspondence between the status of corpora-
tions and the individuals who composed them, it was often blurred.
Thus, as suggested above, within the merchant guilds, the noble-
commoner dichotomy tended to disappear, and the standing army
which emerged in the fifteenth century contained men from all ranks
of society although recognition of social quality was maintained in
the wide gap that existed between the statuses of officer and enlisted
man. (4) The corporations maintained a higher degree of internal
discipline. (5) Among the several functional corporations there was
no explicit hierarchical ordering. The social structure deriving from
estates was stratified; that based on corporations was conglomerate.
Although two systems existed, there was a significant intersection or
interpenetration between them.

The church cannot be accommodated in either of the categories

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

established above. Historically it was one of the primary medieval estates. It was also a functional corporation. Its position in the social order, however, transcended both. It was, in fact, a society in itself providing for all the needs of its personnel. It possessed its own social stratification grading downward from the prelates—archbishops, bishops, and abbots who were identifiable with the secular nobility—to the parish priests identifiable with the commoners. It also had a conglomerate structure whose components were "subcorporations" such as the regular and secular clergy, the military orders, the Inquisition and the universities, each enjoying a particular fuero or jurisdiction. Moreover, although in terms of historical experience, self-identification, and certain aspects of its juridical status, it was a Spanish institution, it was also but a branch of the church universal. In view of these difficulties, within the conceptual framework of this paper, the church can be more properly considered in terms of its constituent groups rather than as a social estate or as a unitary corporation.

At a time that was particularly significant for social formation in America, agitation against and eventual expulsion of Moors and Jews from Spain activated a latent element in peninsular social organization. The status-seeking Spaniard became almost pathologically concerned not only with establishing his hidalguía but also his purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*). Indeed the two qualities became almost coextensive. The latter is overtly ethnic, but its basic derivation was religious. It signified a lineage of impeccable orthodoxy. Thus Pedro de la Caballería, a member of Ferdinand the Catholic's entourage and a well-known Jew, forged an *expediente* supported by testimony from eminent nobles, according to which his progenitors had been "*verdaderos cristianos viejos de limpísima sangre.*"[8] The possession of such qualities or the lack of them influenced not only social status but corporate membership. Purity of blood was a condition of membership in artisan guilds, religious and military orders, municipal *consejos*, and for the award of university degrees.

The concepts of estate and corps were integral parts of the cultural baggage which Spaniards carried with them to the Indies. Social structure there, however, developed a character that differed from its peninsular prototype. This divergence derived from two powerful influences: first, the deliberate intervention of the crown in the process of social formation, a phenomenon which will be considered later in this paper;[9] second, the survival of large portions of the indigenous

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

[9] The role of the state in social formation is examined in Richard Konetzke, "Estado y sociedad en las Indias," *Estudios americanos*, III (1951), 33-58.

population, the importation of substantial numbers of Negro slaves, and miscegenation involving the three races. The ethnic factor produced what colonial writers called a system of castes. The latter word, however, should be taken as the equivalent of the Spanish term *casta*. It did not denote a rigid, closed social system such as that associated with India.[10] Various classifications of the castes appeared. In the early nineteenth century amateur anthropologists constructed elaborate taxonomies such as the following:[11]

1. Spaniard with an Indian woman, *mestizo*
2. *Mestiza* with a Spaniard, *castizo*
3. *Castizo* with a Spanish woman, Spaniard
4. Spaniard with a Negro woman, *mulato*
5. *Mulata* with a Spaniard, *morisco*
6. *Morisco* with a Spanish woman, *chino*
7. *Chino* with an Indian woman, *salta atrás*
8. *Salta atrás* with a *mulata, lobo*
9. *Lobo* with a *china, gíbaro*
10. *Gíbaro* with a *mulata, albarazado*
11. *Albarazado* with a Negro woman, *cambujo*
12. *Cambujo* with an Indian woman, *zambaigo*
13. *Zambaigo* with a *loba, Calpa mulato*
14. *Calpa mulato* with a *cambuja, tente en el aire*
15. *Tente en el aire* with a *mulata, no te entiendo*
16. *No te entiendo* with an Indian woman, *torna atrás*

A simpler classification was commonly used which appears to be the basis of descriptions of "colonial society" in modern textbooks. The elements were:

Spaniard or white (European or American)
mestizo: various mixtures of Indian and Spaniard
mulatto: Various mixtures of Negro and Spaniard
zambo or zambaigo: Indian and Negro
Indian
Negro

For official purposes, particularly the assessment of tribute and military service, three primary groups were identified: Spaniard (Euro-

[10] See the remarks on the use of the word "caste" in Joaquín Roncal, "The Negro Race in Mexico," *HAHR*, XXIV (1944), 531, note 2.
[11] These are described in Nicolás León, *Las castas del México colonial o Nueva España* (México, 1924). See also Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negro de México, 1519-1810* (México, 1946), pp. 175-179.

pean and American) ; castes (castas), that is, persons of mixed blood; and Indians.[12]

Although such classifications were overtly ethnic they were strongly influenced by cultural factors. Thus, in fact and in law, "white" or "Spaniard" was practically coextensive with *gente de casta limpia,* a category which included not only persons of pure Spanish origin but mestizos and castizos who were of legitimate descent, free from the taint of Negro blood, and who "lived like Spaniards."[13] The distinguishing feature of the castes was illegitimate descent or the suspicion of it and the possession of Negro blood or the suspicion of such a taint because of illegitimacy.[14] The taint associated with the Negro derived from his supposed physical and psychological characteristics and his juridical status. His pigmentation and features were regarded as repellent; early colonial officials and chroniclers regarded Negroes and mulattos as *"viles, traidores, ociosos, borrachos,"* etc. They were the people most *"rastreros, pérfidos e inmorales de la humanidad."*[15] As slaves or the descendants of slaves they were *infames por derecho.* As such they were forbidden to bear arms or to enter military service, they were excluded from the clergy and public office, and they were forbidden to intermarry with Indians or whites.[16] In regard to the Indian group, it was composed of ethnic Indians and mestizos who were culturally Indian. In a curiously reverse sort of way, a Spaniard or white might be most accurately defined as a person who culturally and legally was neither an Indian nor a caste; an Indian was a person who was neither a Spaniard nor a caste; and a caste was an individual who was neither Spaniard nor Indian.

Aguirre Beltrán has developed the following method of classifying castes which explicitly recognizes cultural factors in their formation:[17]

[12] *Instrucción reservada que el conde de Revilla Gigedo dió a su sucesor en el mando* . . . (México, 1831), pars. 579-580; Aguirre Beltrán, p. 226; Fernando Navarro y Noriega, *Memoria sobre la población del Reino de Nueva España escrita en el año de 1814* (México, 1954), Table and pp. 21, 24.

[13] Juan de Solórzano Pereira, *Política indiana,* Lib. II, cap. xxx, núms. 1, 20-28; Aguirre Beltrán, pp. 174-175; Angel Rosenblat, *La población indígena de América desde 1492 hasta la actualidad* (Buenos Aires, 1945), pp. 264-65, 271-272.

[14] Aguirre Beltrán, pp. 248-254; Solórzano, Lib. II, cap. xxx, núms. 2, 20-28, 55; Salvador de Madariaga, *The Rise of the Spanish American Empire* (London, 1947), p. 21.
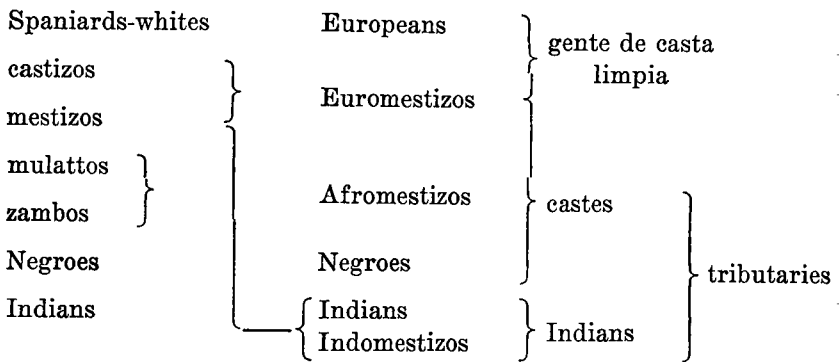
[15] Aguirre Beltrán, pp. 187-190.

[16] The legal status of the castes is examined in William H. Dusenberry, "Discriminatory Aspects of Legislation in Colonial Mexico," *Journal of Negro History,* XXXIII (1948), 284-302.

[17] Aguirre Beltrán, pp. 270-271.

European: persons of pure European descent

Indians: ethnic Indians

Negroes: ethnic Negroes

Euromestizos: persons of mixed European and Indian origin but with predominantly European ethnic and cultural characteristics

Indomestizos: European-Indian mixtures but ethnically and culturally predominantly Indian

Afromestizos: Mixed bloods with a Negro strain

The several systems of classification described above may be correlated as follows:

Spaniards-whites   Europeans   gente de casta limpia

castizos

mestizos   Euromestizos

mulattos

zambos   Afromestizos   castes

Negroes   Negroes   tributaries

Indians   Indians / Indomestizos   Indians

The question arises as to whether these ethnic-cultural groups constituted elements in a definable social structure. The system of castes was certainly a contemporary reality and its component elements were identified in the contemporary mind in a loose reputational way. It is a useful framework for descriptive purposes but it has a limited value for structural analysis. In the case of the elaborate constructions of the early nineteenth-century taxonomists, the types are too numerous to be manageable; they are difficult to identify with any degree of precision, and status distinctions among them are by no means clear. The same criticism is true to a lesser extent of simpler traditional systems and the typology of Aguirre Beltrán. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that there are not enough data available in a usable form to enable such groups to be identified and ordered in a scientific system. The trichotomy Spaniard—caste— Indian, however, presents fewer problems. It does constitute a social structure. Its elements are identifiable; they possess definable social and juridical statuses, and they exist in an ordered relation to each other. They represent an American system of estates which evolved

in an *ad hoc* fashion out of New World circumstances without the support of any fundamental social theory.

The Spanish sector of the population, although of diverse social and ethnic origin, possessed a certain homogeneity deriving from its position as a conquering race and its assumed superior culture. Its identity was supported, moreover, by the possession of or pretension to limpieza de sangre and descent from cristianos viejos, qualities which were identified with legitimate lineage. Its superior status was also expressed in almost universal claims to nobility or hidalguía. Theoretically, this quality derived from two sources: lineage and royal concession, both subject to documentary substantiation. In fact, many Spanish families could claim hidalguía on one of these grounds. Some of the conquerors, first settlers, and later arrivals came from peninsular families of substantiated nobility. The crown also made concessions of hidalguía to Mexican families, although rather sparing-ly.[18] From the outset, however, the conquerors exhibited a sharp consciousness of nobility deriving not from lineage or royal concession but from a sense of personal excellence, from glory in deeds of valor done during the Conquest, and from a pride in noble action. It was such sentiments that moved Pizarro to claim that the Conquest created a new nobility. These feelings became diffused through the entire Spanish population and led the Council of the Indies to declare: "It is undeniable that in those kingdoms [in America] any Spaniard who comes to them, who acquires some wealth, and who is not engaged in a dishonorable occupation, is regarded as a noble." Alexander von Humboldt went even farther. "Any white person," he wrote, "although he rides his horse barefoot, imagines himself to be of the nobility of the country."[19] Nobility, in fact, became largely an officially recognized individual and social state of mind. The concepts of Spanishness, whiteness, limpieza de sangre, vieja cristianidad, and hidalguía tended to become coextensive and together formed a system of values and status determinants clearly identifiable with a major social sector. These qualities were recognized in law, particularly in exemption from tribute, and the hidalgo-pechero dichotomy was thus preserved in the New World.[20] The white or Spanish component of society was the American counterpart of the noble estate of Spain.

The place of the castes in the Spanish concept of a hierarchically organized society is rather difficult to define. Their existence was

[18] Richard Konetzke, "La formación de la nobleza en Indias," *Estudios americanos*, III (1951), 330, 341-346.

[19] Both quoted in *ibid.*, p. 356.

[20] Vicens Vives, III, 430; Mario Góngora, *El estado en el derecho indiano* (Santiago de Chile, 1951), pp. 186-187.

deplored. They really were not supposed to exist. In the eyes of most of the white population they were lazy, vicious, irresponsible, and a threat to social and political stability.[21] Yet they formed a large proportion of the artisan and laboring population of the vice-royalty. As infames por derecho and as payers of tribute they possessed a juridical status or personality and a social status universally recognized and defined by reputation.[22] They constituted a common estate deformed by New World circumstances.

In regard to the Indian, universally minded jurists and theologians argued for the equality of the Spaniards and the indigenous population, but from the outset of colonization a wide chasm yawned between the two races. The Indians existed as conquered people, the Spanish as conquerors. The Spanish became the employers and exploiters of labor, the Indians the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. Profound cultural differences existed between the two peoples; the Indians refused to live like civilized people, that is, like Spaniards, and were regarded by the latter as *rústicas* or *miserables.* Thus, the indigenous population acquired a dependent if not an inferior status which was juridically recognized. In the Laws of the Indies, the Indians were regarded as perpetual minors and wards of the crown and were placed under the tutelage of royal officials in *corregimientos,* of individuals and corporations in *encomiendas,* and of the regular ecclesiastical orders in missions. In recognition of their vassalage, they were required to pay tribute; they were forbidden to dress like Spaniards, to ride horses, or to bear arms. On the other hand, they were conceded privileges and immunities which in effect constituted a fuero. Official lay and clerical protectors oversaw their welfare; they had access to special tribunals such as the *Juzgado de Indios;* they were exempt from the direct jurisdiction of the Holy Office and from various taxes such as the *alcabala* and *diezmos.* Although functionally they were commoners, they were juridically distinct from the castes and constituted a peculiarly American estate.[23]

The three primary estates contained internal stratifications based partly on ascribed status deriving from lineage, degree of whiteness, and nobility, and in part from status acquired through wealth or royal favor. Within the Indian component, the upper stratum consisted of a nobility whose rank was inherited from the preconquest *caciques* and confirmed by the Spanish crown. This group was juridically identified with the white nobility in that it was exempt from tribute and from legal inhibitions imposed on the general Indian

[21] Aguirre Beltrán, pp. 187-190.
[22] Solórzano, Lib. II, cap. xxx, núms. 20-28.

population but it remained culturally Indian.[24] At a lower level were the notables who occupied posts of distinction in Indian communities, while the base of the pyramid consisted of the mass of the indigenous population.

Within the white estate there existed a group which might be described as an upper nobility. Initially this was comprised of the conquerors who by virtue of their feats of arms regarded themselves as a new nobility. Immediately below them came the first settlers whose excellence derived not from martial exploits but from merits acquired in the initiation of colonization, the occupation of new territory for the king, and the founding of towns and cities. These two groups were rewarded for their eminent services by encomiendas: that is, grants of Indians from which they were privileged to extract labor and/or tribute. During the seventeenth century they tended to fuse and together were called by jurists, *beneméritos de Indias*.[25] Initially the encomendero class gave indications of evolving into a military nobility along lines reminiscent of the emergence of the Spanish nobility in the Middle Ages. The encomienda initially displayed distinctly feudal features, particularly in its military aspects. In effect the crown and the encomenderos were parties to a feudal contract. The former granted the encomienda as a benefice, while the latter acknowledged vassalage, swore fealty, and were obligated to be ready with arms, horses, and retainers to fight the enemies of their lord. In order to fulfill this obligation, they were required to reside in the province in which they held their encomienda; in case of absence—for which permission was required—they had to appoint a champion (*escudero*); if a minor inherited, his guardian or tutor appointed a champion; if an encomienda passed to a woman, she was required to marry within a year so that her husband could fulfill the military obligations entailed.[26] The army of encomenderos resembled the feudal host and was the principle reliance of the crown for defense of the viceroyalty up to the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Thus operations against the Chichemecas in New Galicia in 1541-1542

[23] The principal legislation affecting the juridical status of the Indian in Spanish America is brought together in *Recopilación de leyes de los reinos de las Indias*, Lib. VI. Extensive commentary on Indian legislation is found in Solórzano, Lib. II. It is analyzed in Góngora, pp. 198-221.

[24] Lesley B. Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain* (Berkeley, 1950), p. 120.

[25] Góngora, pp. 186-190.

[26] Solórzano, Lib. III, cap. xxv; José Miranda, *Las ideas y las instituciones políticas mexicanas, 1521-1820* (México, 1952), pp. 33-34, 46; J. H. Parry, *The Audiencia of New Galicia in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1948), p. 9. Góngora presents a thoughtful essay on feudal elements in the conquest and settlement of America (pp. 181-185).

were conducted largely by encomenderos.[27] Some ten years later when Viceroy Velasco requested assistance from the crown for operations against rebellious Indians, he was told that the responsibility lay with the encomenderos because "the encomiendas are rents which His Majesty gives to the encomenderos because they defend the land."[28]

The emergence of a military nobility from the encomienda system, however, was prevented by several factors. In the first place, the encomienda proved to be unsatisfactory as a military institution. The encomenderos were a restless lot and, despite repeated prohibitions, abandoned their provinces for the lure of new conquests. Moreover, they displayed a marked reluctance to engage in organized campaigns, particularly if these were distant from their city and of long duration.[29] As a result, during the last part of the sixteenth century the burden of defense was shifted to regular troops and to a citizen militia drawn from the white population in general.[30] The sons and grandsons of the conquerors failed to perpetuate the martial spirit of their ancestors. Although the trappings of military service—titles of rank, uniforms, and military honors—were eagerly sought after, they were honorific in character and were not associated with attraction to a military way of life. At the end of the sixteenth century, old soldier Bernardo de Vargas Machuca lamented that although the military profession was the most honorable and sublime of all the arts, it had fallen into disfavor and there were few citizens who would not smile at the thought of a career of arms.[31] A century later, Viceroy the Marquis of Mancera complained about the disinclination of the Mexican nobility for military service.[32]

A second factor which inhibited the development of a powerful upper nobility in the Indies was the opposition of the crown. The encomenderos, whose mentality was essentially medieval, aspired to combine encomiendas with possession of land and jurisdiction to create seignorial estates, but the crown insisted on keeping grants of land and grants of Indians separate; it refused to grant Indians in perpetuity and, except in rare cases such as the Marquisate of the Valley of Oaxaca and the Dukedom of Atrisco, it denied seignorial jurisdic-

[27] Góngora, pp. 175-176; Simpson, *Encomienda*, p. 121.

[28] Góngora, p. 176.

[29] Góngora, pp. 175-177; Silvio Zavala, *New Viewpoints on the Spanish Colonization of America* (Philadelphia, 1943), p. 73.

[30] Konetzke, "Estado y sociedad," pp. 38-39; Philip W. Powell, *Soldiers Indians and Silver* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1952), pp. 111-112, 115, 119, 130.

[31] *Milicia y descripción de las Indias* (2 vols., Madrid, 1892), I, 60-61; II, 61-62.

[32] "Instrucción del marqués de Mancera al duque de Veragua," 1673, *Instrucciones que los vireyes de Nueva España dejaron a sus sucesores* (México, 1867), p. 275.

tion to encomenderos. In the reforms of the 1540's, the latter were prohibited from extracting personal services from their charges and allowed to collect only tribute.[33]

Thus the beneméritos became pensioners of the crown, a tamed nobility without any real vitality. Essentially they were dilettantes. They adopted the dignified mien and deportment of the noble estate. Among themselves and in their intercourse with other social sectors they insisted on being addressed as hidalgo or caballero. They eagerly sought titles of Castile and habits in the military orders of Spain. Their reading consisted of books of noble deeds and pious works and they displayed an extreme religiosity. They were vain, sensitive, disdainful of the mechanical and commercial arts, and addicted to luxury and ostentation. Perhaps their most distinguishing characteristic was an exaggerated sense of honor, a term not translatable in bourgeois concepts of rectitude, strict accounting for responsibility, moral conduct, and the like, but as self-esteem based on status. The meaning is more precisely conveyed by the Spanish word *pundonor*.[34]

The formation of an American structure of estates was accompanied by the transference and florescence of the functional corporation along with its legally defined responsibilities, privileges, and immunities. The church came with the Conquest and during the sixteenth century most of its major subcorporations, the university community, the Holy Office, the secular and regular orders, the cathedral chapters, and the like became constituent parts of Mexican society. The municipal corporations likewise followed the Conquest. A permanent army appeared in the latter part of the century. The consulado of Mexico City was chartered in 1592,[35] and most of the artisan guilds made their appearance in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[36]

As in Europe the relation between the estates and corporate structure was complex. On the one hand, following the medieval prescription, there was some correspondence between the two. Theoretically, *casta limpia* was a requirement for admission to all the corporations, and in practice the white element monopolized the consulado, the miner's guild, the officer corps of the army, the university communi-

[33] Konetzke, "La formación de la nobleza," pp. 350-352; Góngora, pp. 179, 340.

[34] Vicens Vives, III, 427.

[35] Robert S. Smith, "The Institution of the Consulado in New Spain," *HAHR*, XXIV (1944), pp. 61-62.

[36] The best account of the guilds in New Spain is Manuel Carrera Stampa, *Los gremios mexicanos* (México, 1954). A collection of their ordinances may be found in *Legislación del trabajo en los siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII. Breve ensayo crítico* (México, 1938).

ty, and the higher levels of the ecclesiastical corporations. However, the reluctance of whites to engage in dishonorable occupations complemented by the economic aspirations of the more enterprising castes and Indians led to the admission of large numbers of non-whites into the craft guilds.[37] They were also enlisted in the army and found their way into the lower levels of the church, particularly the secular clergy. Following the peninsular pattern there was an interlocking of class and corporate organization.

The preceding analysis of social structure employs a reputational or subjective method. That is, it is based on the way people of the time conceived of and defined their own and others' role and status. Colonial Mexican society may also be examined objectively; that is by assuming the position of an outside observer and by means of objective criteria dividing a society into groups, classes, or strata. Thus, a modern class system—upper, middle, and lower groups—based on the ownership and use of property may be discerned. The upper class consisted of the owners of haciendas and estancias, mines, textile factories, and mercantile establishments, and the upper levels of the bureaucracy and the clergy. At a point not clearly definable, this sector graded into a middle class composed of retail merchants and shopkeepers, the more substantial artisans, professionals, owners of small and middle-sized ranchos and mines, managers and salaried employees of rural properties, mines, and workshops, and lower ranked ecclesiastics and bureaucrats. The lower class comprised less affluent shopkeepers, peddlers, and artisans operating outside the guilds; servants, laborers, and a mass of landless, propertyless, and jobless idlers and vagabonds.[38] Such a classification presents serious difficulties. Given adequate data on distribution of wealth, income, occupation, and the like, it might be practicable to analyze colonial social structure in terms of economic classes. The value systems commonly associated with such sectors, however, were lacking or at best rudimentary. Miners, merchants, and artisans might be functionally bourgeois but their mentality was not. Until the very end of the colonial period at least, they continued to think of social role and status in terms of nobility, titles, honor, and corporate membership, although in the case of the Spanish upper classes wealth reinforced nobility and vice versa.[39]

[37] Carrera Stampa, pp. 223-243.

[38] The best discussion of colonial social structure in terms of economic class is Sergio Bagú, *Estructura social de la colonia* (Buenos Aires, 1952).

[39] The last statement is probably debatable. M. Hernández Sánchez-Barba in describing colonial society in the eighteenth century postulates a "bourgeois mentality" (in Vicens Vives, IV, pp. 422-427). The research of Stanley Stein on Mexican merchant groups may throw some light on this subject.

The lower classes can be roughly identified with castes and Indians. Functionally they formed a proletariat. No class consciousness, however, existed within either element or linked the two together. A wide gap separated the rural Indian peon and the urban mulatto shoemaker. Their placement in society did not derive ultimately from economic function but from ethnic and cultural qualities recognized in law. Economic classes can probably be best regarded as an incipient situation and as a concept which can best be used for studying social development over a period extending beyond the colonial era rather than for the colonial period itself.

The social organization of New Spain was complicated by a peculiarly American cleavage which cut across the white estate and the corporate structure in general. This was the sharp status distinction between the European-born and American-born Spaniard, between criollo and *gachupín*. This schism originated within the first generations of Spaniards in the New World. The conquerors, first settlers, and their descendants deeply resented latecomers, both private citizens and crown appointees, who competed for the royal favors which they regarded as rightfully theirs. The new arrivals, on their part, resented the arrogance and privileges of the beneméritos. Original resentments were deepened and elaborated in subsequent generations. The peninsular Spaniard in common with his northern European contemporaries deprecated colonials as culturally and even biologically inferior. They were unenterprising, unreliable, and frivolous. The creole regarded the gachupín as common, pushing and, except for the higher levels of the church, army, and bureaucracy, as socially inferior. He resented the preemption of the choicest benefices in church and state by the European Spaniard despite the strict legal equality of the two groups. But he was embittered above all by the fact that the status conveyed by "born in Spain" was forever beyond his reach. Yet there was a certain ambivalence in the creole attitude. While he maligned and contemned the gachupín, he envied him because his lack of extended contact with Indian or Negro gave him a better claim to limpieza de sangre, and he eagerly sought marriage alliances with the European, even the most common, to reinforce his family lineage.[40]

[40] On the subject of gachupín-creole rivalry the observations of Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa in their *Noticias secretas de América* (2 vols., Madrid, 1918), II, Chap. V, are particularly revealing. Among modern studies of specific aspects of the problem is Antonio Tibesar, "The *Alternativa*: A Study of Spanish-Creole Relations in Seventeenth-Century Peru," *The Americas*, XI (1955), 229-283. A more theoretical approach is Richard Konetzke, "La condición legal de los criollos y las causas de la independencia," *Estudios americanos*, II (1950), 31-54.

Some observations may now be made on the related problems of social cohesion, social control, and social change. The hierarchical society continued to be thought of in organic terms. Its component parts were supposed to be mutually interdependent, interacting, and together forming the functioning body social. In fact, however, the parts exhibited a strong compulsion toward autarchy. Juridically, each to some extent was a separate entity, a state within a state. Each was wrapped up in its own affairs and interested only in its own welfare, its privileges, and its immunities, all of which had to be defended jealously against similar aims of other segments. There existed no common values, interests, or objectives. There were Indians, castes, nobles, soldiers, priests, merchants and lawyers but there were no citizens.[41] In the terms of Ortega y Gasset, it was an invertebrate society.[42]

This society was held together by a combination of a number of circumstances. Among them was inertia. A society of estates and corporations was in the natural order of things and until the latter part of the eighteenth century there was no serious protest against a social system based on juridical and social inequality. Social unrest took the form of drives to improve the status of the individual and the group, not efforts to change the system. The hierarchical order was supported through the virtual monopoly of arms, wealth, prestige, and authority by the white nobility. Until the very end of the colonial period, its existence was encouraged by the crown as a means of social and political control. In an opinion of 1806, the Council of the Indies stated:

It is undeniable that the existence of various hierarchies and classes is of the greatest importance to the existence and stability of a monarchical state, since a graduated system of dependence and subordination sustains and insures the obedience and respect of the last vassal to the authority of the sovereign. With much more reason such a system is necessary in America, not only because of its greater distance from the throne, but also because of the number of that class of people who, because of their vicious origin and nature, are not comparable to the commoners of Spain and constitute a very inferior species.[43]

[41] Pablo de Olivides' description, written in 1769, of the highly compartmentalized character of Spanish society (quoted in Beneyto, p. 290) is equally applicable to New Spain.
[42] The theme of his book *Invertebrate Spain* (New York, 1937).
[43] Quoted in Konetzke, ''Estado y sociedad,'' p. 58.

The crown contributed to the creation and maintenance of the system in various ways. It was the "head" of the body social. It was the ultimate author of legislation defining the status of each estate and corporation. It had at its disposal the means of compulsion: the bureaucracy, the ordinary courts, the military, and the police. It was also the ultimate source of privileges and favors; it conceded land, monopolies, titles, honors, and offices. It reconciled class and group conflicts; it was the supreme court of appeal. As the final arbiter it checked and balanced the powerful centrifugal forces which were a constant threat to social stability. Perhaps most fundamental was the crown as a mystique and a symbol. Américo Castro observed that the people of Spain and Spanish America were united by a principle external to them, a mystical faith in and loyalty to the symbol of the crown. This faith was "an anchor of salvation, as was religious faith . . . ."[44] "The monarchy . . . , especially from Ferdinand and Isabella on, appears surrounded by Messianic prestige."[45] Bad legislation was not the fault of the king; he was inadequately informed. Wrong decisions could not be attributed to him; he was improperly advised. The hostility of creoles was directed against Spaniards, not the crown. Revolts and riots were not against the king but against his servants. The monarch might be a weakling or an imbecile; his servants might be ridiculed or even defied; his laws could be evaded, but the crown as a symbol was sacrosanct.[46]

The church was an active partner of the crown in maintaining social control. It wholeheartedly supported a society of hierarchies and privileged classes both on doctrinaire grounds and as a beneficiary of the system. It employed directly to this end its control over education, its vast resources of moral suasion, and its temporal wealth. It upheld, moreover, the role of the crown as the ultimate temporal authority and as a symbol of Spanish Christianity.

Mexican colonial society has traditionally been viewed as static and ponderously stable, an interpretation epitomized in the expression, *la siesta colonial.* Traditional history has it that this structure was abruptly fractured by the Wars of Independence producing a half century, more or less, of anarchy. In fact, from the moment of the Conquest it was characterized by continuous although unspectacular change.[47] The formation of the castes and the creation of an

[44] *The Structure of Spanish History* (Princeton, 1954), p. 51, note 15.
[45] *Ibid.,* pp. 187-188.
[46] Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, *La sociedad española en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid, 1955), pp. 29-30; Morse, p. 78; Vicens Vives, IV, 416.
[47] The evolutionary character of Mexican society is clearly brought out in Lesley B. Simpson, "Mexico's Forgotten Century," *Pacific Historical Review,* XXII (1953), 113-121.

American system of estates was certainly an evolutionary if not a dynamic process. In the preceding pages reference has been made to qualities of flexibility and openness which characterized social stratification. Within certain limits upward and downward mobility existed. Castes with luck, enterprise, or official favor might and did become whites, while whites through misfortune or mismanagement might sink into the lower estates. A similar mobility appears to have existed between castes and Indians. Bagú emphasizes the miscibility of the colonial social system and particularly stresses the instability of the "middle classes." Adverse regulation, misfortune, lack of enterprise, or alcoholism constantly submerged artisans and shopkeepers into the mass of the indigent poor.[48] Substantial changes in the character of the upper nobility also took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In rural areas the nucleus of a new elite appeared, the masters of the great haciendas and estancias. Some of its members derived from the old encomendero nobility but others were American and European Spaniards who were rewarded for services to the crown by grants of land. Although some of the beneficiaries came from titled families and others subsequently acquired titles, the new upper nobility was primarily a nobility de hecho rather than de derecho. Titles simply confirmed a status derived from the ownership of latifundia. In contrast to its attitude toward the encomienda, the crown permitted and encouraged the growth of the hacienda as an instrument of economic development and social control. The strength of the hacendado group was consolidated by the entailment of its estates. By preserving indivisible family patrimonies, entailment established a family lineage through which status could be transmitted.[49]

The growth of a landed aristocracy was paralleled by the development of a mercantile patriciate in the cities of the viceroyalty. This element derived in part from the old morador class; that is householders (vecinos) of the sixteenth century towns who were not among the privileged few receiving encomiendas and who generally lived by trade or manufacturing.[50] It was augmented by second sons of encomenderos and new arrivals from Spain who entered commerce. The concentration of trade in a few cities, and monopolistic privileges conceded to merchant groups encouraged the accumulation of mercantile fortunes by a relatively small number of families. The mine-

[48] Chap. II and particularly pp. 87, 92, 104-105. See also Vicens Vives, III, 526.

[49] François Chevalier summarizes the formation of this class in his La formación de los grandes latifundios en México (México, 1956), pp. 233-240. See also Vicens Vives, III, 520-524.

[50] Góngora, p. 185.

owners who accumulated great wealth through the exploitation of Mexico's silver resources constituted a related group. The possession of great wealth conferred influence and status, much to the disgust of the old encomenderos. ''Those who yesterday operated shops and taverns and engaged in other base occupations,'' wrote one disgruntled benemérito, ''are today placed in the best and most prized positions.''[51]   Mercantile and mining fortunes were recognized or perhaps it would be better to say exploited by the crown through the concession of titles of nobility. These were granted with increasing frequency in the latter half of the eighteenth century.[52]

At the same time that new elite elements were emerging, the economic base of the encomenderos was deteriorating. In the seventeenth century there was a strong trend toward reversion of encomiendas to the crown while those remaining in private hands were subjected to new fiscal exactions. The lot of the bulk of the encomenderos is described by Guillermo Céspedes:

With such a small sustenance, the more tenacious of the beneméritos—converted into social parasites—composed accounts of the merits and services rendered by their distinguished ancestors, and swarmed the antechambers of the viceroys to beg *corregimientos, tenientazgos, alcaldías,* or any other bureaucratic post befitting the glory of their lineage. Their pride of caste, exacerbated by their economic difficulties would not countenance any occupation or employment other than waiting patiently for a shower of royal favors. They looked down on the newly rich, emerged from the 'ashes and soot of the stew-pots,' and particularly on the hateful and wealthy merchants and on the *chapetones* who came from Spain to enjoy benefices in the governmental bureaucracy. They continued their addiction to pious works which revealed to them a God by whose inscrutable designs the grandsons of the conquerors lived on the verge of starvation. Some even reached the point of asking if they were suffering punishment and penance for the blood which their heroic ancestors shed during the conquest.[53]

With the abolition of the encomienda system in the early eighteenth century they finally disappeared as a class.

A certain coalescence took place in at least a peripheral way among the various elements of the colonial elite. The more enter-

[51] Quoted in Vicens Vives, III, 524-525.
[52] *Ibid.,* III, 529-530; IV, 423; José Bravo Ugarte, ''Títulos nobilarios hispanoamericanos,'' *Memorias de la Academia Mexicana de la Historia,* XV (no. 3, julio-septiembre, 1956), 258-264.
[53] In Vicens Vives, III, 518-519.

prising encomenderos managed to escape the general decadence of their class. Some managed to retain or acquire landed estates. Others, forgetting their class pride, married into the aristocracy of wealth or entered commerce themselves. Such concessions although distasteful were not degrading since commerce at the wholesale level had become officially and socially honorable.[54]   Among the other groups, wealthy merchants and miners employed excess capital for the purchase of rural estates, and needy hacendados contracted marriage alliances with willing merchants and mining families.[55]

During the eighteenth century and particularly its later four decades social change was accelerated by the interaction of multiple influences including population growth and progressive miscegenation, expansion of areas of settlement, economic development and the increase of wealth, fiscal, administrative, and military reforms, and infiltration of egalitarian doctrines from abroad. Among the whites, new opportunities appeared to acquire wealth and improve social status. Creoles found additional avenues for social advancement in the officer corps of newly organized regular and militia regiments while the castes through enlistment in the army achieved exemption from tribute and acquired status through the possession of the *fuero militar*.[56]   In general there appears to have been a further blurring of the line between white and caste. Official documents and legal formulae of the last half of the eighteenth century frequently employ expressions such as *que se tenga por español* or *recibido por español*[57] when referring to mixed bloods, and euphemisms such as *pardo* and *moreno* were increasingly used in place of Negro and mulatto. Aguirre Beltrán quotes contemporary sources to the effect that all those who were not clearly Indians or of *color achocolatado* were said to be and were considered as Spaniards.[58]   Indeed, identifications based on place of birth and ethnic origins tended to be replaced by others expressing only social quality. In the service records of militia and regular officers in the 1770's, under *calidad* are found the terms mestizo, castizo, pardo, *español europeo* and *español americano*. By 1806 these were largely replaced by such identifications as *noble, ilustre, conocida, distinguida, honrada*, and *buena*.[59]   Without renouncing

[54] Beneyto, p. 226.

[55] Vicens Vives, III, 526; Chevalier, p. 240.

[56] Konetzke, "Estado y sociedad," pp. 40-41; L. N. McAlister, The "Fuero Militar" in New Spain (Gainesville, 1957), *passim* and particularly Chap. IV.

[57] Rosenblat, pp. 264-265, 271-291; "Diversas solicitudes," AGN (México), Indiferente de Guerra, vol. 194, *passim*.

[58] Pp. 174-175, 273.

[59] For example, compare the *hojas de servicios* of the Legion of the Prince for 1771 (AGN, Indiferente de Guerra, vol. 138A) with those of the Battalion of

its support of a stratified society, the crown attempted to ameliorate some of the more obvious—and more troublesome—inequities. The new army had an explicitly stated secondary aim of providing honorable and status-conferring careers for creoles in the officer corps and castes in the ranks.[60]   Titles were conceded with greater frequency to creoles, and the castes could achieve legal whiteness by the purchase of cedulas called *gracias al sacar*.[61]   Moreover, a cedula of February 1, 1795 dispensed pardos and *quinterones* from the status of *infame,* authorized them to contract matrimony with whites, and permitted them to hold public office and enter Holy Orders.[62]   The castes also found advocates among the whites. Viceroy Croix believed that their superior physiques, amenability to discipline, and inclination toward military service made them better soldiers than the effete and prideful whites.[63]   Lucas Alamán, who was certainly no egalitarian, rated them as the most useful part of the population and reported that the only time that Matías Martín de Aguirre, a European Spaniard and deputy to the Cortes of Madrid in 1821, rose to speak was to deliver a eulogy of the mulattos who had served in the royalist armies.[64]

There appears also to have been some erosion of the bases of the corporate social structure. During the reign of Charles III, direct and indirect efforts were made to restrict or to level or to rebalance the power and status of traditional corporate groups. The principal device was the limitation of privileged fueros and the renovation and extension of the royal or ordinary jurisdiction. Crown policy was most striking in the case of ecclesiastical corporations. The royal patronage was extended, the ordinary ecclesiastical fuero was restricted, rights to church asylum were limited, the power of the Holy Office was circumscribed, the Society of Jesus was expelled from

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Provincial Infantry of Guanajuato and the Regiment of Provincial Dragoons of the Prince for 1804 and 1806 respectively (AGN, Indiferente de Guerra, vols. 121A and 278A). The latter two units were formed from the Legion in the late 1790's.

[60] *Instrucción del virrey marqués de Croix que deja a su sucesor Antonio María Bucareli* (México, 1960), par. 138 (pp. 111-112); ''Dictamen del Coronel D.ª Fran.ᶜᵒ Antonio Crespo, Inspector interino de las tropas . . . de N.ª Esp.ª sobre su mejor arreglo y extablecim.ᵗᵒ,'' México, July 31, 1784, MS 173, Biblioteca Nacional de México, pars. 227-235; 238-254.

[61] Rosenblat, p. 291.

[62] Beneyto, p. 276.

[63] ''Memoria conserniente à la expedición q.ᵉ bajo las ordenes del Exm.º Sr. D. Juan de Villalba se hizo à la América,'' August 20, 1764-April 30, 1769, MS in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, the Newberry Library, pp. 156, 159; Croix to Minister of the Indies, Julián de Arriaga, México, October 26, 1767, AGN, Correspondencia de los Virreyes, vol. 1/11, no. 289, fol. 456.

[64] *Historia de México* (5 vols. México, 1942), I, 33.

Spain and the empire and the famous *amortización* of 1804 struck at the pious foundations. In New Spain there appears to have been both an absolute and relative decline in the power and prestige of the ecclesiastical establishment as a whole.[65] The reglamento of free trade of 1778 was a blow to the power of the consulados and at the same time the state loosened the restrictive practices of the artisan guilds. In New Spain an increasing volume of trade and manufacturing was conducted outside the guild system.[66] One striking and consequential exception to these trends must be noted. At the same time that the status and power of other corporate groups were being subverted, the metropolitan and colonial armies were not only strengthened and reorganized, but their fueros were extended, their prestige enhanced, and their morale cultivated.[67]

In summary, three general and interrelated observations may be made. First, a close look at New Spain on the eve of independence reveals a gradual erosion of a social structure based on estates, corporations, and juridical inequality, and outlines, at least, of a new system based on economic class. Perhaps the most apparent manifestation of the latter phenomenon was the growing strength of the mercantile "bourgeoisie" and the emergence of an entrepreneurial sector among the textile manufacturers of Valladolid, Guadalajara, and the Bajío.[68] Second, the velocity of change was insufficient to accommodate severe tensions within the social order, principally the stored-up resentments of the lower estates and the frustrations of the white creoles. The former exploded in 1810, the latter boiled over in 1821, and the two combined fleetingly in the latter year to produce political independence. Third, the hierarchical colonial society survived the break from Spain with some reordering of its components, but with the disappearance of the symbol of the crown as an instrument of social control, its invertebrate character became fully emergent. It required nearly one hundred years for the formation of a juridically egalitarian society and the creation of a new social myth as an instrument of cohesion.

[65] Mariano Otero makes some penetrating observations on the state of the Mexican church on the eve of independence (*Ensayo sobre el verdadero estado de la cuestión social y política que se agita en la república mexicana* (México, 1842), pp. 54-59.

[66] Agustín Cue Cánovas, *Historia social y económica de México* (2 vols., México, 1946-1947), I, 115.

[67] Manuel Giménez Fernández, "Las doctrinas populistas en la independencia de Hispano-América," *Anuario de estudios americanos*, III (1946), 615; Félix Colón de Larriátegui, *Juzgados militares de España y sus Indias*. 2nd ed. (4 vols., Madrid, 1786-1796), I, lxv-lix. See particularly the royal decree of February 9, 1793, reproduced in McAlister, pp. 76-77.

[68] In connection with the textile manufacturers see Robert A. Potash, *El Banco de Avío de México* (México, 1959), Chap. I.