

Outline 1: Spain in 1492

Conquest in Spain's history: If we look at the history of Spain, we see the crucial role that conquest has always played in molding its history and culture. The prehistoric inhabitants of what we now call Spain were conquered by the Iberians and Celts, who were conquered by Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians.

- 201 B.C.- 5th century A.D.: rule of the Romans
- 5th century-711 A.D.: rule of the Visigoths
- 711-1492 A.D.: rule of the Muslims

Characteristics of Muslim Rule: Muslim conquerors settled mainly in the fertile southern regions of Spain, which they called Al-Andalus, and is today still known as Andalusia. Islamic rulers in Spain brought with them a rich cultural heritage and a thriving intellectual tradition. They improved agricultural methods, built libraries, introduced new crafts and industries and made their capital, Cordoba, into an economic and intellectual center in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Generally speaking, especially in the first centuries of their rule, they practiced a policy of religious tolerance towards Christians and Jews alike.

The Reconquest: The Muslim empire, however, was weakened by internal discord, and the Reconquest began as a series of separate attempts by different Christian kings and nobles to take advantage of this discord in order to regain lost land and serfs. The Reconquest only slowly developed the character of a religious crusade.

The first half of the 13th century marked the turning point of the Reconquest for the Christians. By 1252, all that was left of Muslim-controlled territory was the kingdom of Granada, but that would remain standing for another two and a half centuries. By the 15th century, the Christian territories were divided into three separate kingdoms, each one under different rule: Portugal, Castile and Aragon. Of these, Castile was dominant.

Castile in the 15th Century:

- 1455: Henry the IV, the king of Castile, resumed the Reconquest
- 1469: Isabella, heir to Castile, married Ferdinand, king of Sicily and heir to Aragon.
- 1474: King Henry IV died and Isabella began a five year struggle against her sister, Juana, for the crown of Castile.
- 1478: Inquisition established
- 1479: Isabella became queen of Castile and Ferdinand inherited the kingdom of Aragon. Castile and Aragon became united under the joint rule of Ferdinand and Isabella, known as the "Catholic Kings." The unification, however, was in name only. Each kingdom retained its own constitutional system and political organization.

1492:

- January 1492: Grenada conquered, Reconquest completed
- March 1492: Expulsion of Jewish population from Spain
- October 1492: Columbus landed in "New World"

Key terms: Reconquest, Castile, Aragon, Inquisition, *letrados*, *conversos*

Questions for "Columbus' Letter on his First Voyage:"

1. Who is Columbus' audience? Given this, what do you think his goal is in writing this letter?
2. What is the tone of the opening paragraph? How does it set the scene for what follows?
3. How does he describe the islands (esp. Hispaniola) and their natural assets? What does he emphasize?
4. How does he describe the people of the islands?
5. How does he describe his conduct towards them, and their attitudes towards him?
6. What strategies does he use in this letter to minimize the significance of the linguistic and cultural differences he encounters?
7. In what ways do we see Columbus' "dual mentality" at play in this letter?