

PROMISE

Colonial Emigration to America

CHRONOLOGY: 1492-1830 approx.



CAUSES:

- Discovery of America
- Economic situation of the Iberian Peninsula
- Attraction of possible enrichment
- Attraction of possible social mobility

DESCRIPTION:

A migratory process from the Kingdom of Castile towards the new territories began after the discovery of America in 1492. This process only stopped temporarily with the emancipation of the colonies and the appearance of the new Hispano-American states. It was always directed and controlled by the Crown not only as regards the number of emigrants but also in its composition. The Spanish migratory process towards America was huge and has been defined as “*the first European migratory movement across the Atlantic*”. The Spanish emigration was not a free population movement but a political action of the imperial mother country regarding emigration and settlement, based on law, although nobody was forced to go against their will.

It has been estimated that during the 16th century about 300,000 people emigrated to America, mainly from Andalusia but also from Castile and Extremadura. These emi-

grants went to America on the off-chance, attracted by the possibility of enrichment and social promotion. They belonged to different social classes, but were mainly middle class from villages (servants, artisans, merchants, scholars, priests, etc.) because the upper class and the landowners were reluctant to go to such an uncertain destination. The emigrants preferred to settle in cities, creating the upper and urban class of the continent, whereas the native, and later African, manpower carried out work in the countryside.

In relation to the 17th century the number of emigrants is not very clear, but it could come to around 200,000. In any case the number was fewer because, although the Iberian Peninsula was suffering a crisis, the colonial society was completely established and therefore there were fewer opportunities of advancement.

During the 18th century Spanish emigration to the New World decreased drastically. This emigration was balanced with an endogenous increase of the Creole population and a big growth in the black slave



trade. It has been estimated at about 50,000 people throughout the century, but we have to take into account that there was a large fraudulent emigration of which there are not any records.

In conclusion, the highest possible estimations of the emigration are of less than one million people, when the population in the Iberian Peninsula was of nine million inhabitants. This makes the annual rate of emigration low, 3 per 10,000 inhabitants. So, we could say that American emigration hardly had any demographic effect on the growth of the Spanish population.

In general the emigration to America was a voluntary movement of people impelled by the economic situation of the Iberian Peninsula and by new opportunities. In addition there was a more specialised emigration sent by the Crown, composing of civil servants who organised and governed the colonies, and military men for defence. They went with merchants who worked in the urban areas.

This migratory movement to the colonies continued until quite recently, making America one of the attractive destinations for Spanish emigration for a number of centuries.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA:

600.000 approx.



BIBLIOGRAPHY:

VV.AA.:

Historia General de la Emigración Española a Iberoamérica.
1992.

WEB PAGES:

-www.derecho.unex.es/biblioteca/Sumarios/Ft/emigra.pdf

-http://nti.educa.rcanaria.es/cultura/canaria/emigracion/La_emigracion_canaria.htm

-<http://www.proyectosalanhogar.com/historia/Historia2.htm>

-<http://www.ceha-madeira.net/canarias/hia39.html>