Encomienda and Hacienda: The Evolution of the Great Estate in the Spanish Indies

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What the Spanish colonial period added to pre-Columbian America can be described briefly as the contents of two complementary master institutions, the Spanish city and the great estate. Historians have now begun to penetrate deeply into these subjects, and soon it will be possible to deal with Spanish American colonial history from its vital center rather than from its surface or periphery. While the colonial city is the less well explored of the two themes, its study can proceed on a firm footing, since the continuity of location, function, and even formal organization must be evident to all. Understanding the great estate has proved more difficult, for the estate had a greater diversity of forms and changed more than the city, both in law and in substance. The most serious problem, not always recognized as such, has been the apparent lack of connection between the encomienda of the conquest period and the hacienda of the mature colony.

Earlier in this century some scholars assumed, quite logically, that the encomienda must have evolved directly into the hacienda. The restricted rights of the encomendero were thought to have become gradually confused with land possession through some process never revealed in detail. Then in a series of publications written mainly during the 1930s, Silvio Zavala and Lesley B. Simpson proved to general satisfaction that this identification was false.[1] The encomienda had no juridical connection with land, and as time passed, it grew weaker rather than stronger, until, in Mexico at least, it was little more than an annuity.

Most historians today would no doubt agree that there is some sort of equivalence between encomienda and hacienda, as well as a certain temporal correlation in that one declined as the other emerged. But after the massive and successful drive to establish the encomienda's juridical history, scholarly opinion has tended to insist more on the separation than on the connection.

Before going on, it may be of interest to consider why scholars have so readily tolerated a gap breaking one of the major continuities of Spanish American development. A large part of the reason is that, until all too recently, the top item on the research agenda was to define the legal framework of the Spanish empire. Men concerned with the subtleties of legal concepts and procedures felt little inclination to pursue any continuity between a governmental, tribute-collecting institution, the encomienda, and a private, land-owning institution like the hacienda.

In the period since World War II, historians of Spanish America have gone beyond legalism, but rather than stepping directly onto the firm ground of social and economic reality, they have often leaped past it to statistical research and highly categorical or topical analysis. For the great estate the favorite categories have been land and labor. Unfortunately it is not much easier to see the continuity between encomienda and hacienda from the viewpoint of land and labor studies than from that of pure legalism. What could be the connection between a landless institution and one based squarely on the legal ownership of large tracts? Where was the continuity between an institution that procured shifting labor by virtue of a governmental grant and one that depended very largely, it was thought, on a permanent force of debt peons?

A final basic factor inhibiting work on the continuous history of the great estate has been lack of knowledge about the encomienda as a functioning institution, for scholarship was long forced to rely almost exclusively on legislative and other indirect sources. In recent years better sources have indeed come to light, and scholars have begun to interpret the new information. Notarial records are proving to be an excellent if incomplete means of exploring the manifold economic activities of encomenderos and

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their subordinates in the crucial central areas of Mexico and Peru. Much can be learned about landholding aspects of the encomienda through painstaking research with land titles in a restricted locality.

The postwar years have also brought a more complete, realistic, and articulated picture of the hacienda, yielding new points of comparability with the encomienda. François Chevalier's now classic description of the Mexican hacienda provided the first adequate social view of the institution; more recently Charles Gibson in *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* modified the stereotype of debt peonage and showed that in the Valley of Mexico, haciendas operated even during the late colonial period with a relatively limited skeleton crew outnumbered by temporary or seasonal help coming from the Indian villages.[2]

The main purpose of the present article is to bring the separate histories of encomienda and hacienda into some connection with each other. Such an undertaking means advancing a bit beyond previous interpretations. It does not require rejection of the juridical history established by Zavala and others, however, since the continuities to be observed here are mainly social and economic in nature. Only one aspect of the legal history of the encomienda seems to call for comment. Both Zavala and Simpson recognized that in practice encomenderos could own land, but they tended to give the impression that there was literally no juridical link between the encomienda and land holding.

Nevertheless, aside from de facto patterns, there was a certain indirect legal connection that can be demonstrated from the encomienda titles themselves. North American scholars have generally accepted Simpson's interpretation that from the inception of the encomienda in the Antilles, it was first of all a grant of the right to collect tributes, however prominent a feature labor use may have been. Yet Zavala's more detailed treatment of the institution's development shows that the original encomienda or repartimiento of the Antilles was a grant of the right to use labor, with no initial link to royal tribute in fact or theory. It was only in the course of a long legislative and administrative campaign that the crown and its officials succeeded first in adding the tribute idea to labor use, and later in restricting the encomendero's rights to the enjoyment of tributes alone.

Actually there were two strands of institutional development, perceptibly distinct even though always intertwined. On the one hand, there was the "encomienda," created by high officials. This was a governmental office similar to the encomienda of the Spanish military orders, strictly limited in tenure, and essentially conceived as a concession of the right to collect and enjoy the king's tribute. On the other hand, there was the locally inspired "repartimiento," stemming from the original ad hoc division made in Hispaniola by Columbus, and spreading to other areas through a process of diffusion at the local level. This was a much more amorphous institution, without much framework of legal theory, but basically concerned with labor use.

Even in legal format, the arrangements existing in Mexico and Peru during the conquest period owed more to the repartimiento of the Antilles than to the official conception of the encomienda. The word "repartimiento" triumphed in both popular and official usage to designate the actual geographical area of the grant. The titles of encomiendas in the period before the New Laws do not emphasize tribute; in fact, they hardly ever mention that word. What was assigned, to take the documents literally, was not tribute but Indians, who were to work on the encomendero's properties, his haciendas, and *granjerías*; in Peru as in the Antilles, mines were often mentioned as well. If the titles are accepted at face value, then, the standard encomienda of the conquest period was not in itself a grant of property, nor did it provide a specific legal vehicle for property acquisition. But it was addressed to a man presumed to be a property owner, who could otherwise take little advantage of the grant in its own terms. Góngora shows that in Chile encomenderos cited their official position as justification for receiving grants of land (mercedes) within the limits of their encomiendas, and even for preventing such concessions to others in the area.

Still, legal connections between land owning and the encomienda remain tenuous. A far more significant link is to be found in the realm of actual practice, though the present state of research prevents its thorough analysis. One can say with some assurance that during the conquest period encomenderos in all the major regions of the Spanish Indies regularly owned land as private individuals and that many of their holdings were inside the limits of their own encomiendas. When the nature and extent of these holdings are understood in detail and in time depth, someone can begin to write the systematic institutional history of the Spanish American great estate. For the present, only provisional conclusions can be drawn about any actual derivation of individual haciendas from individual encomiendas.

The state of knowledge concerning land holding as a de facto aspect of the encomienda has already been very well outlined by Silvio Zavala. In his *De encomiendas y propiedad territorial* . . ., he demonstrated a drastic legal separation of encomienda and land owning. Nevertheless, the course of his

argument required him to adduce several cases of land use and ownership by encomenderos. Shortly thereafter, in carrying out a study on the institutional history of Guatemala, he unearthed documents proving that the heirs of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, while encomenderos of San Juan Chaloma, had gradually built up a hacienda there through land grants and purchases from Indians. This was evidence, Zavala said, of the "sustained tendency of the encomendero's family to convert itself—by specific entitlement distinct from the encomienda title proper, that is, by land grant (merced) or purchase—into the proprietor of lands contained within the jurisdiction of the encomienda towns. Thus an hacienda would be born under the cloak of the encomienda, though independent as to juridical title." The encomendero could "create an hacienda within the encomienda."

One type of information is lacking now as in 1945, when Zavala wrote. This is the relative frequency with which this phenomenon occurred. Zavala pointed to the only conceivable method of finding out. It could be done, he said, at least for certain regions of the Indies, "on the basis of a scrupulous comparison of encomienda titles with titles supporting territorial property in the same region, inquiring at the same time into kinship between the families of the encomenderos and those of the hacendados."

In its inherent significance, Zavala's analysis of this subject is at least as weighty as his voluminous work on the legal history of the encomienda. Buried as it is in a minor publication on a different subject, however, it has been little noted, and historians have not followed his prescription for further research. Only one work of high scholarly standards attempts to trace a detailed account of land owning in a restricted area from the conquest period to independence and beyond—Jean Borde and Mario Góngora's *Evolución de la propiedad rural en el Valle del Puangue*. While estimable and indeed epoch making, this book does not represent quite the type of research that Zavala envisioned. First, though there are precious bits of information and analysis, systematic investigation of the encomienda is lacking. Moreover, its authors make no attempt to go deep into family histories and interrelationships. Such research will demand a concentrated, special effort to master an enormous amount of detail. Góngora finds that some encomiendas in the valley studied gave rise to haciendas in Zavala's sense, and others did not. Of exceeding interest for the present article, however, is the fact that the family of the valley's greatest encomendero, starting in the first generation, built up a large hacienda in the valley center, the only one in the whole region to maintain the same ownership through the entire colonial period.

Aside from this, relevant information must be sought mainly in works basically concerned with other themes. Chevalier's study is not systematic at the local level, and he is much more interested in haciendas and sugar plantations than in the encomienda. He gives some examples of encomendero families who came to own great properties near their encomiendas in central Mexico, but retreats from any pronouncement on trends, since there were many other haciendas not traceable to that origin. Gibson in his *Aztecs* demonstrates that some used the encomienda as an opportunity to acquire land and he gives the names of several encomenderos who became property owners. But he also believes that there were many other modes of land acquisition.

Elsewhere the findings are also suggestive but fragmentary. Orlando Fals Borda's local study of a highland community in Colombia, while oriented toward Indians, does show that the original encomendero of the region not only acquired a large property that became one of the area's most "aristocratic" haciendas, but even gave it the name (Aposentos) under which it continued to be known until today. For Yucatán, Arnold Strickon asserts that when encomiendas were finally abolished in the eighteenth century, the encomenderos tended to buy up the core area of their former grants, the *planta* where the headquarters of the developing hacienda was located.

From these examples a pattern seems to emerge. In most regions there came to be considerably more haciendas than there had been encomiendas. As the Spanish sector expanded and more families grew rich and powerful, nonencomenderos managed to acquire large tracts of land in areas originally dominated by encomenderos. But in a typical case, if there be such a thing, the oldest, stablest, most prestigious, and best-located hacienda would have stemmed from the landholdings of the original encomendero and his family. Research that could establish the general validity of such a pattern, however, would require years and the effort of many scholars. And even when accomplished it would probably not reveal the heart of the matter. Unless it went far beyond land titles, it could only demonstrate a certain genealogical relationship, and we can be almost certain that even this relationship did not exist in many regions, especially in the thinly settled cattle areas where the encomienda was weak or absent.

Legal history yields few links between these two institutions, which dominated the Spanish American countryside, while any actual line of descent cannot yet be traced in detail. Accordingly, the only means available to establish the connection is a phenomenological

comparison of the two. This in itself could never prove—nor is it meant to prove—that the hacienda arose out of the encomienda, but it can show that the change was far less than a transformation. The comparison, to be just and fruitful, must range broadly over associated practices and structures that, one could maintain, were not a part of the institutions proper. This procedure is necessary because the true comparability exists at the level of de facto practice, social organization, and broader functions. Neither encomienda nor hacienda ever found adequate legal expression of its full impact on society.

First of all, we may compare the two institutions as to proprietorship. It will be immediately apparent that the encomendero and the later hacendado were cut from the same cloth; they were patriarchs of a special kind who ruled both the countryside and the city. Following both custom and law, the encomendero lived and maintained a house in the city to whose jurisdiction his encomienda belonged. Similarly the hacendado, while not a full-time urban resident in most cases, kept a large town house and held citizenship in the nearest city. The urban role played by both types expressed itself in the domination of the municipal council. In the conquest period, the councils of most cities consisted exclusively of encomenderos. The later hacendados never achieved such a complete monopoly of urban office, since miners in some places and merchants in others were also council members, but nevertheless the dominance of the hacendado over municipal councils was the norm.

Each institution in its time was a family possession, the main resource of a numerous clan. Each gave rise to many entails; but, with or without legal devices of perpetuation, each had a strong tendency to remain in the family. As the effective heads of society, both encomenderos and hacendados felt themselves to be an aristocracy whatever their origins and negotiated for honors and titles from the king, particularly coats of arms and membership in Spain's military orders.

The balance between country and city shifted considerably from encomendero to hacendado. The encomendero stayed ordinarily in his city residence, as luxurious as he could afford to make it, and went to his encomienda as rarely as once a year on a trip that combined a pleasant country excursion and a tour of inspection at tribute-collecting time. He did not have a house for himself on the encomienda, though he would often build or preempt structures there to house his subordinates and to store products. In contrast, the typical hacienda had an impressive country house as one of its outstanding features. Yet though some hacienda houses were like palaces, at least as many were fortress-warehouses, massive and utilitarian compared to the hacendado's town house with its carved balconies and fountains.

The hacendado and his family could be counted on to live in town as much as possible. On occasion, for example in the depressed seventeenth century, a hacendado might not be able to afford the heavy expenses of ostentatious town living and would sit out many months of involuntary exile in the country. But when times were good, he would live mainly in the city and travel out to the hacienda for one good long vacation and inspection tour, much like the encomendero. Both types were rural-urban, with their economic base in the country and their social ties in the city. Only the balance between the two poles changed, corresponding to the slow and uneven movement of Spaniards and Spanish life out into the countryside through the course of the colonial period.

What one might call the staff of the two institutions was nearly identical. Both encomendero and hacendado had large collections of relatives, friends, and guests who partly lived on the bounty of the patron, partly worked for him. More specifically, both encomendero and hacendado had in their hire a steward called a majordomo, who took over nearly all the practical management of the estate. The man in this post would be well educated and would enjoy reasonably high standing in the Spanish world; yet he remained socially subordinate to the employer. Like his master the steward was urban-oriented; he was at home in the city markets, where he borrowed money, bought supplies, and sold the estate's produce.

On the encomienda, or at least on large encomiendas, there were beneath the majordomo a number of combined tribute-collectors, labor foremen, and stock-watchers, often called estancieros. Though their function was of considerable importance, their status was the lowest possible within the Spanish sphere. Typically they originated in the humblest strata of Spanish peninsular society or came out of marginal groups such as sailors, foreigners, or Blacks. The later hacienda had exactly the same kind of low-level supervisory personnel, sometimes still called estancieros—which significantly was the first word for cowboys on cattle haciendas. They still came from the same social strata, belonging to the Spanish world, but at the very fringes of it. By this time, mestizos were commonly found in such work, along with Blacks, mulattoes, and poor Spaniards, but their relationship to Spanish society as a whole was precisely that of the earlier estancieros. These people lived more in the country than in the city, though often against their preference. In any case, they spoke Spanish, rode horses, used Spanish weapons, implements, and techniques, and thus constituted a

Spanish-urban extension into the countryside, taking their norms from the cities.

At the lowest level, raw labor in both cases was done by Indians or near-Indians, divided into two distinct worker types, as will be seen shortly. We must also take into account the ecclesiastical personnel of the great estate. Each encomienda was supposed to have its doctrinero to minister to the Indians, and this person would also serve as the encomendero's private chaplain. The priest present on the larger haciendas duplicated these functions.

In one aspect it would be natural to expect a thorough transformation—in the evolution from public to private, from a semigovernmental office to an agricultural enterprise. Here too, however, a great deal of continuity can be observed. On the governmental side, encomenderos had the nominal paternalistic duties of protecting and instructing their Indians. Although their post was not supposed to entail true jurisdiction, it is clear that they did in fact rule over these Indians during the early period, openly calling themselves their señores or lords. Hacendados, as mere property owners, lacked any legal justification whatever for such a role; yet they too achieved it in practice. As recognition of their power, the authorities would often give them positions such as captain of the militia or alcalde mayor ("district governor"), and they would exercise formal jurisdiction as well. Both encomenderos and hacendados envisioned themselves as lords with retainers and vassals.

Even on the economic side, in the evolution toward a private agricultural enterprise, there was no lack of common elements in encomienda and hacienda practice. On the encomienda, traditional, unsupervised Indian production ordinarily had primacy, but the encomendero would regularly go on to take possession of land, often on or near his encomienda. (Usually, but by no means always, he received a formal land grant from the town council or the governor.) On these holdings, most commonly called estancias, he would raise crops and livestock for his own establishment and for sale in town markets or mining camps.

Of great importance in the agricultural labor force of the estancias were Indians falling outside the legal framework of the encomienda. Almost everywhere certain Indians soon came to be attached personally to individual Spaniards, who might or might not be encomenderos; in the circum-Caribbean region, these Indians were called *naborías*, and in Peru yanaconas. Indians of this type, plus some Black and Indian slaves, formed a permanent skeleton crew for the estancias, under the supervision of the estancieros. They were aided by a much more numerous force of encomienda Indians performing "tribute labor," particularly at times of maximum work load. In the case of Peru, we know that the yanaconas of the conquest period had the use of plots they cultivated for their own sustenance. From a very early time there were also nonencomenderos with much the same kind of estancias, though their position was rather precarious, and their possibilities were limited at first because of uncertain access to seasonal labor by encomienda Indians.

All the above characteristics persisted into the hacienda period. We should not forget that our term "hacienda" is a scholarly convention; seventeenth-century Spanish Americans used "estancia" at least as often to designate a large landed property, retaining the earlier meaning of this word. Ownership of land by Spaniards expanded greatly as the hacienda began to emerge, but the Indian villages still held much land. Even more important, the hacienda did not exploit all its vast holdings intensively; instead, certain restricted areas were cultivated under the direction of majordomos. To do this work the hacienda possessed a more substantial crew of permanent workers than the estancias of the conquest period. (The workers' names at this time were *"gañán"* in Mexico and still "yanacona" in Peru.) But they were still aided by a large seasonal influx of laborers from the independent Indian villages, impelled now by direct economic considerations rather than by encomienda obligation. Sometimes the villagers floated in and out according to their own and the hacienda's temporary needs, but in some places, as in Yucatán, they had a regularized obligation very reminiscent of earlier labor arrangements.

Both resident labor and nonresident labor, under both encomienda and hacienda, were still very close to pre-Columbian systems of periodic obligatory work. All types of workers performed something less than full-time duties, and obligations were usually reckoned by the household rather than by the individual. Also rooted in the pre-Columbian period were the so-called personal services that were so prominent a feature of the early encomienda. Most of these were inherited by the hacienda. This is especially clear for Peru, where in the twentieth century hacienda workers still delivered produce to town and provided rotating servants in the town house of the hacendado, as they once did for encomendero.

The renowned self-sufficiency of the hacienda was also anticipated in the conquest period. Using their rights to Indian labor and produce as a base, encomenderos created networks of enterprises in almost all branches of economic activity that were locally profitable, though livestock and agriculture always occupied a prominent place. They did their best to make coherent economic units of these varied holdings, each part supplementing and balancing the

others. The whole estate was under unified management, since the majordomos were responsible both for official encomienda activities and for enterprises of a more private nature, as were the estancieros at a lower level.

The tendency to build complete, diversified estates, then, was already observable at a time when the Spanish sector of the economy was generally booming under the influence of newly opened mines and the demand of the nascent Spanish towns for all kinds of supplies. This fact throws a new light on the self-sufficiency so characteristic of the later hacienda, which has often been explained very largely as a response to depressed conditions. Much the same type of structure appeared earlier in response to social and economic forces of quite a different kind. The vision of society the Spaniards brought with them to America included a clear picture of the attributes of a great estate and its lord. Aside from his mansion and numerous servants, guests, and vassals, he must have land, cattle, and horses, and various agricultural enterprises from wheat farms to vegetable gardens. From the early conquest period, this ideal constituted a fixed pattern of ambitions for successful Spaniards. First the encomenderos and then the hacendados exerted themselves to carry it out to the last detail, even where local conditions rendered it economically irrational.

But by and large the great estate scheme was economically rational as well as socially desirable. Everything the estates produced was wanted in the cities; taken together these products helped create a Spanish as opposed to an Indian economy. The desire to assemble a complete set of varied holdings was not inconsistent with a thoroughly commercial orientation. Self-sufficiency is very hard to distinguish from the diversification or integration of a commercial enterprise, and the complete refusal to specialize, which may strike us today as amateurish, characterized not only the lords of estates, but colonial merchants as well. In an age of commercial rather than industrial capitalism, there was little thought of expansion and usually little justification for it. The constant effort of the most acute commercial minds was to monopolize, drive out competition, and sell at high prices to the severely limited market. The hacienda would carry the tendencies toward self-sufficiency and monopoly to their logical conclusion, without ever giving up a strong element of market orientation.

In fact, though inspired in part by social ambition, the hacendados' desire for lands they would not exploit fully made very good economic sense. Monopolizing the land discouraged the rise of competitors in the immediate neighborhood. If the hacendado actually developed production on the whole vast expanse, however, he would have flooded the city market, as sometimes happened in any case. It seems probable that the size of urban markets and the amount of silver available were the real factors limiting hacienda production at any given time. The most market-oriented establishments in the Spanish Indies, the sugar plantations, still did not typically become specialized, but raised much of their own maize, wheat, and cattle. A drive toward self-sufficiency, diversification, or completeness—for the three cannot be separated—was a constant in Spanish colonial estates from the early sixteenth century onward.

All in all, the replacement of the encomienda by the hacienda involved only a shift in emphasis, whatever the factual details of institutional development. A semigovernmental domain, serving as the basis of a private economic unit, gave way to a private estate with many characteristics of a government. There was also a significant movement into the countryside, but both institutions stretched from the city into the country, and indeed their main function was to connect the two worlds. The estate ruled the countryside in the city's name; it brought products to the city and the elements of Spanish culture and society to the country. After the city itself, the estate was the most powerful instrument of hispanization in Spanish American culture. During the early period, when Indian structures were relatively intact and Spanish cities relatively small, the estate could emphasize government and tribute collection over active supervision. As Indian structures deteriorated and the cities grew, supervision increased; the city came into the country.

The point of view here suggested makes it possible to treat the evolution of the great estate as one single line of development underneath the changing forms on the institutional surface. To judge from certain portions of their works, scholars like Zavala, Miranda, and Gibson have long had a good subjective understanding of this deep continuity, but they have never chosen to give it methodical expression. The standard works still tend to speak in terms of three successive systems: encomienda, repartimiento, and hacienda. The internal history of each system is worked out separate from the others; each new stage is seen as requiring a much greater transformation than was in fact the case.

But looking beneath the level of formal institutions and administrative policy, the evolution could be expressed in simplest terms as follows. At all times there were private Spanish holdings in the countryside with workers attached to them, and these holdings always drew temporary labor from the Indian villages. From the conquest period until the present

century, the constant trend was for the Spanish properties and their permanent crews to grow, while the Indian villages and their lands and production shrank. It now begins to appear that Spanish agricultural enterprises, generally speaking, never achieved complete reliance on a resident working force during the colonial period. (Scholars familiar with conditions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries may have projected into the colonial period the solid, sedentary force of debt peons thought to characterize more recent times.) The villagers came to work on the estancias and later haciendas, first through encomienda obligations, then through the mechanism of the repartimiento, and finally through individual arrangements, but they were always the same people doing the same things. In the conquest period, the greatest landowners were the encomenderos, whose estancias formed an integral if informal part of their estates. Yet from the very beginning, there were other Spaniards with similar holdings, both small and large. Encomendero families or their legal successors seem often to have retained, consolidated, and even expanded their properties, which may have had a special aura of permanence and nobility. But the lands of the nonencomenderos increased even more, until the countryside contained several times the number of great estates present in the conquest period. This development paralleled the great expansion of the Spanish or (broadly speaking) urban sector. The organization and social composition of those who owned and managed the estate hardly changed from the age of the encomienda to the hacienda of the eighteenth century.

Giving importance to these basic social and economic continuities does not require one to believe that the encomienda as an institution involved land holding, or that it evolved directly into the hacienda. As far as agriculture and land ownership are concerned, the technical antecedent of the hacienda was the estancia rather than the encomienda. One may retain a narrowly legal definition of the encomienda as the right to enjoy labor and tribute and of the hacienda as pure land ownership (though the latter interpretation is more rarely made). At the same time, it is quite possible to appreciate that the Spaniards tried to use each legal framework in turn as the basis of the same kind of great estate. Ideally this would have combined jurisdiction over vassals with vast possessions of land and stock. In the encomienda, only the governmental aspect was formally expressed, and the rest was left to the spontaneous action of socioeconomic ambitions and opportunities. The hacienda was just the opposite, giving legal status only to land ownership and leaving the jurisdictional aspects to de facto patterns. This basic, essentially unitary social institution, the great estate, was quite fixed as to ideal attributes and social organization, and it maintained constant its function as intermediary between the growing Spanish towns and the receding Indian villages. It evolved along two simple lines—constant rise in the legal ownership of land and change in the balance of the labor force, as permanent workers increased and temporary workers decreased.

Let us view the great estate, therefore, as a basic social pattern with certain permanent attributes and a few recognized principles of evolution. By so doing, we can hope to understand the increasingly complex picture that is emerging as research proceeds to areas other than Mexico. Each region in the Spanish Indies seems to have produced a different form of the encomienda and a different timetable for its downfall. The same is true for the repartimiento or mita. Some areas suffered great population loss, while others did not; still others had little or no population to start with. Some estates arose from holdings associated with encomiendas, others from lands accumulated by administrative and judicial officials, others from humble wheat farms. From region to region, the hacienda veered toward pastoralism, cereal production, sugar growing, and other activities. But we can cope with all these variations if we understand them as retarding, hastening, or modifying an institution that was ultimately embedded in Spanish social practice and had its own coherence, its own dynamics of development.

One may conclude that the rise of the hacienda was essentially a development rather than a struggle. The evolution of the great estate responded to such realities as the size of cities and Spanish populations, the degree of acculturation among the Indians, and the nature of Spanish society in early modern times. The royal policy of discouraging an independent aristocracy and the humanitarian campaigns to protect the Indians deserve intensive study in themselves, but the struggles over these matters cannot be said to have greatly affected the evolution of the great estate. Wherever it might appear that the crown or the church became a prime mover in its development, one will find on close examination that deeper forces were at work. Crown policy has been credited with the destruction of the encomienda, but natural developments in the colonies had doomed the institution. On the one hand, the fortunes arising from commerce and mining were not directly dependent upon the encomienda; on the other hand, the sheer growth of Spanish society produced newly powerful families who began to carve out estates of their own, undermining the inflexible encomienda system.

Historians have commonly observed the general tendency of the conquest period to set basic patterns for later times. The hacienda, taking shape in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has appeared to be a major exception. But the interpretation of the great estate set forth here reintegrates the hacienda into the general picture. In the broader perspective, one may argue that the conquest period created the function and the basic social and economic modes of organization, while following years brought mainly growth or shrinkage—in other words, quantitative change. Such a view implies that perhaps scholars investigating the history of the hacienda should begin at the beginning. One of the few complaints that one might bring against the magnificent work of Chevalier is that, faced with a vast body of material on the hacienda, he accepted a conventional view of the conquest period and the encomienda, without submitting them to the same kind of analysis he applied to his more immediate subject.

In general, those who engage in future research on forms of the great estate should take into account the institution's multiple dimensions and not limit themselves to "hacienda studies," or to the study of "land and labor systems," or most especially to "rural history." In all known embodiments, the Spanish American great estate was closely related to the city, indeed almost inseparable from it. Spanish American colonial history has three principal elements: the city, the great estate, and the Indian village. Of these only the village was truly and thoroughly rural. The function of the great estate was to mediate between city and country, to carry back and forth supplies, people, and ideas that were vital to the growth of Spanish American civilization.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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ENDNOTES

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