

Grade Level: high school

The Economic Concerns of Empire

Overview: This lesson is an exploration of the logistics of managing an empire, from the Spanish perspective. It uses primary document analysis to understand an important method of imperial administration: royal inspections. The document, which comes from the inspection carried out in colonial Mexico on the orders of King Charles III of Spain between 1765 and 1771, provides a window into the larger process of how to run an empire, and the importance of tax collection to this goal.

Objectives: by the end of this lesson, students should be able to

Identify

- a trend towards higher tax collection in colonial Mexico
- identify calculation errors in the documents

Understand

- the importance of tax collection to the management of empire
- the complexity of controlling the vast and diverse territories under Spanish rule

Required Materials: attached worksheet (see below) for each student, accompanied by image of original document printed or projected available for all students as a reference

Time Required: 50 minutes

Ideal Class Size: between 25-30

Instructions:

Provide Historical Context: (10 minutes) By the mid-eighteenth century, the Spanish monarchy ruled an extensive and incredibly diverse empire, from the coasts of New Spain (Mexico) and the Caribbean, to the Andes Mountains, and even to the Phillipine Islands. The empire had expanded significantly since the first expeditions arrived in the Americas in the early 1500s. However, the challenge was not arriving to the Americas, but managing to keep in under control from thousands of miles away in Madrid. One of the ways that the Spanish Court kept track of the happenings of its American territories was by sending royal inspectors to look into local affairs. Sometimes these officials had the responsibility of investigating the job performance of

specific bureaucrats, but usually their investigations were more comprehensive to help the Crown find ways of improving efficiency and increasing royal revenue. In that way, the Spanish monarchy maintained its political and economic priorities overseas. These inspections were called *visitas*.

About this Document: (10 minutes) This document comes from the six-year-long inspection carried out in colonial Mexico starting in 1765. This was the beginning of a period of political and economic change throughout the empire called the Bourbon Reforms. When the Spanish royal families intermarried with some of the French royal family, the Bourbons, this Bourbon dynasty came into power in the Spanish world as well. Learning from the French, who also had colonies in the Americas, economic efficiency of the colonial territories became a main priority for the Spanish monarchy under the Bourbons. Therefore, by the time of this royal inspection, concern for increasing royal revenue was paramount. Reports on production value like this one were an important part of the royal inspector's investigation. No matter where it took place within the empire, once the royal inspector arrived, all local officials, even the highest-ranking ones, had the responsibility and expectation to cooperate with his investigation. In this case, cooperation meant reporting production values from various cities from the past few years so that the inspector could determine the efficiency of local economies.

Document Analysis: (30 minutes, broken down below) Have students analyze the information from the document by using the translated and abbreviated version provided in this worksheet. Students should be in small groups of 3-5. Guide their discussion according to the questions of **content** and **significance** below.

- 5 minutes of reading the table on the reference sheet on their own
- 10-15 minutes of open discussion about what the documents mean within their groups
- 10-15 minutes discussing the questions as a class

Reference Sheet:

This is the information from the main tables in the primary document, translated to English

Production Values from 1766 through 1767

Parochial District	Production Value in pesos, tomines, and granos**			Total Overall
Mexico City Area	61,055p	7t	6g	
Puebla	58,354p	6t	10g	
Valladolid	60,559p	4t	3g	
Oaxaca	46,935p	4t	5g	
Guadalajara	19,044p	6t	4g	
Durango	6,634p	7t	0g	
Merida de Yucatan	17,903p	7t	9g	
				270,489p 4t 1g

Production Values from 1768 through 1769

Parochial District	Production Value in pesos, tomines, and granos			Total
Mexico City Area	120,858p	5t	10g	
Puebla	107,738p	7t	6g	
Valladolid	77,685p	4t	6g	
Oaxaca	50,494p	5t	0g	
Guadalajara	17,212p	0t	4g	
				373,989p 7t 2g

Total increase in production value from period 1 (1766-1767) to period 2 (1668-1769):

103,500p 3t 1g

**Units of measurement: pesos, and smaller units called tomines and granos were all based on weight, usually measured in gold or silver

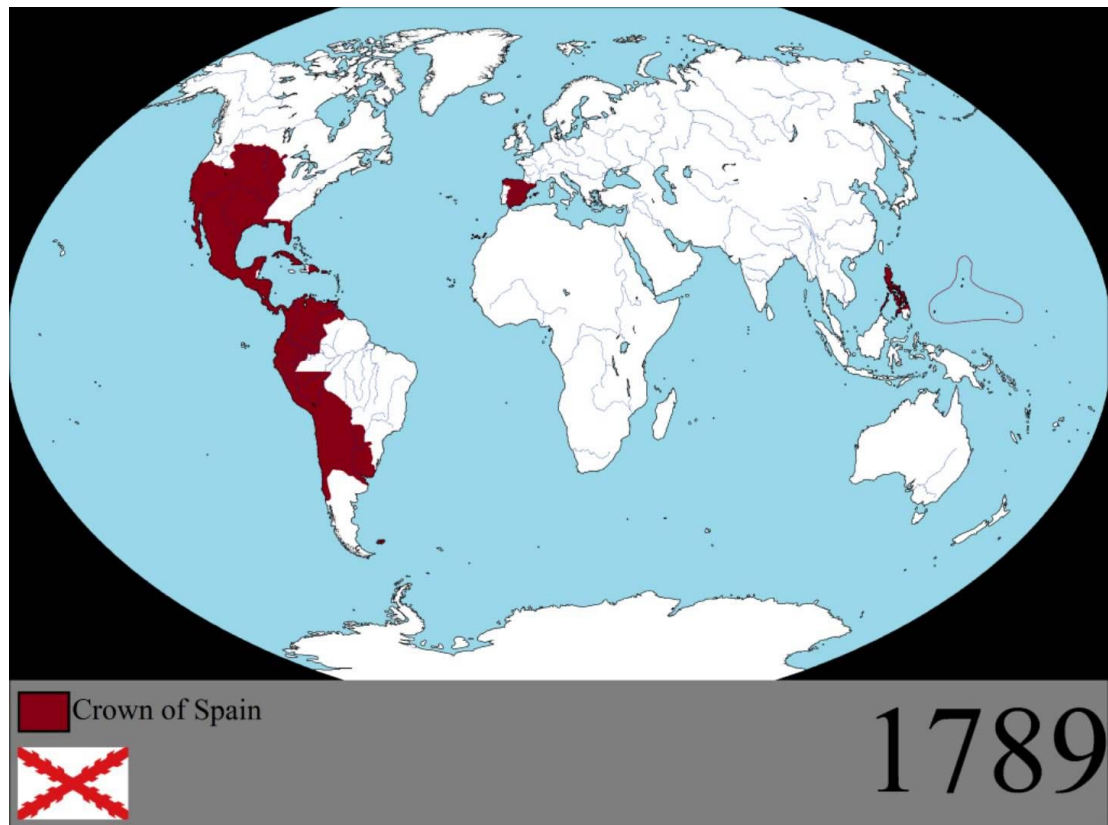
Discussion Questions

Content:

Are these calculations accurate? Why do you think that is?

Why might a town's economic production have increased during this period?

Significance:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueu5yohTBek>

If we look at a map of how expansive the empire was, and think about how spread-out people were, can you think of some obstacles to collecting accurate economic records?

What does the overall report suggest about local economies? How might the king have responded when he eventually received this info?