AP World History: Coercive (Forced) Labor Systems in the Early Modern Period

Overview: Although slavery had existed in human societies since the emergence of early complex societies in Mesopotamia and other river valley societies, it was transformed with the establishment of a global trade network. At the same time new coercive labor practices also emerged, while traditional systems of forced labor received renewed support. Peter Stearns has defined forced labor as a system “requiring work performance and sometimes a share of the proceeds of other work, while preventing freedom of movement” (Stearns, 1998, page 232). Clearly, feudal and manorial systems in Japan and Western Europe during the Postclassical period qualified as forced labor systems under this definition, and, along with slavery, demonstrate the long-term usage of coerced labor in world history. Yet, the nature of forced labor systems shifted in the Early Modern period to become more coercive, harsher and abusive than in previous periods. Serfdom had declined in Western Europe but expanded in Eastern Europe, particularly Russia, throughout this time period. In Latin America, Europeans implemented four types of coercive labor system: Slavery, Encomienda, Repartimiento and Mita; in North America, slavery and, for a period of time, indentured servitude, were in operation. Forced labor systems would eventually appear in European holdings in South and Southeast Asia as well.

Coercion: The use of force and intimidation to gain compliance from someone.

Monoculture: Having one chief agricultural export.

Plantation Zone: The group of societies in the Atlantic World that relied on monoculture and slave labor – sugar, tobacco, cotton, indigo, rice.

Plantation Complex: “The term plantation complex [is] used to describe the economic and political order centering on slave plantations in the New World [tropical regions]” (Phillip Curtin, The Tropical Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade).

Engenho: “mill” in Portuguese. The term came to represent the system of sugar production (growing sugar cane and then processing it into molasses), which included the land, labor (slaves) and capital (finance but also buildings, animals and technology).

Encomienda
- “entrustment” in Spanish
- First developed during the Reconquista to extract labor from Moors
- In the Americas, in addition to extracting labor, the system required conquistador to provide instruction in Christianity and allowed the natives use of the land for subsistence farming.
- System was easy to abuse because there was little accountability for the treatment of native workers
- Land and workers could not remain within a family (non-hederity)
Repartimiento
• Reformè the encomienda system to limit the working hours and to mandate wages for natives

Mita
• Developed by the Inca as an annual labor tribute from villages to the state. In exchange for their labor, the Incan government provided social services to workers, especially as they aged.
• The Spanish adopted this system to acquire workers for the most dangerous and difficult jobs in the silver mine of Potosi. Each native village was required to send on seventh of its adult male population to work every four months.
• Although workers did receive wages, they were hardly compensation for the back-breaking work, or dangerous tasks that involved mercury. Death rates were high.

Peonage
• Loans are provided to farmers to purchase seeds, tools & equipment, and supplies, and the loan is repaid through labor.
• Profits from this type of farmer were small, and so the workers became more and more indebted over time.
• Laws prevented indebted workers from moving to escape their obligations, and so the workers had no choice but to stop working their own farms and work exclusively to pay off past loans.

Serfdom
• Workers are considered to be part of the land, and so their labor is at the discretion of the land owner. Technically, serfs are not considered property themselves, but land owners could sell the labor of serfs.
• In Eastern Europe, serfdom had increased in the Postclassical period in order to secure the tribute required by the Mongols.
• In the Early Modern period, the Russian Tsars increased the numbers of serfs in exchange for the loyalty and service of landowners.

Indentured Servitude
• Contract-bound work in which labor is provided for a specified period of time, often five to seven years, in exchange for travel expenses for passage from Europe to the Americas.
• Under these contracts, laborers received food, clothing and shelter.
• This system was developed by the Virginia Company in the early 17th century to provide an inexpensive and ready workforce in the Virginia colony.
• Some indentured servants came to the Americas as part of a legal sentence, a practice known as penal servitude.
Document 1

Source: Two encomienda records for estates in the vicinity of Mexico City, 1547.

They [the Indians] are assessed each day two chickens and four loads of wood and two loads of maize, and fodder for the horses; and every eighty days twenty petticoats, and twenty shirts, and four loads of blankets of henequen [native plant], and the labor of their plantings of peppers, beans, maize, wheat, and the carrying of all this to the city, and the completion of the house [of the encomendero], and they are not to be charged beyond this....

On April 21, 1553, by agreement, the services of the thirty-two Indians that they gave to their encomenderos were commuted, so that instead of them they are to give from now on 192 common gold pesos per year in payments made every eighty days, which prorated, amount to 42 pesos, six tomines [silver coins] per payment, and they are not to give anything else to Pedro Moreno and whoever has them in encomienda.

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**Purpose**

WHY or FOR WHAT REASON was the source produced at the time it was produced? What was the author’s GOAL?

**Audience**

For whom was the source created and how might this affect the reliability or accuracy of the source?

**Point of View**

Can you identify an important aspect of WHO the author is and explain HOW that might have impacted what they wrote?
Source: Antonia Vasquez de Espinsoa, Spanish friar, *Compendium and Description of the West Indies*, 1620s.

According to His Majesty’s warrant, the [Potosi] mine owners of this massive range have a right to the mita of 13,300 Indians in the working and exploitation of the mines, both those which have been discovered, and those now discovered, and those which shall be discovered. It is the duty of the Corregidor [district military officer] of Potosi to have them rounded up and to see that they come in from all the provinces between Cuzco over the whole of El Callao and as far as the frontiers of Tarija and Tomina [a region of approximately 139 villages]….

These Indians are sent out every year under a captain whom they chose in each village or tribe, for him to take them and oversee them for the year each has to serve; every year they have a new election, for as some go out, others come in. This works out very badly, with great losses and gaps in the quotas of Indians, the villages being depopulated; and this gives rise to great extortions and abuses on the part of the inspectors toward the poor Indians, ruining them and thus depriving the… chief Indians of their property and carrying them off in chains because they do not fill out the mita assignment, which they cannot do….

After each has eaten his ration [on Monday morning], they climb up the hill, each to his mine, and go in, staying there from that hour until Saturday evening without coming out of the mine; their wives bring them food, but they stay constantly underground, excavating and carrying out the ore from which they get the silver….

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