



Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763

Henry Kamen

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How did a barren, thinly populated country, somewhat isolated from the rest of Europe, establish itself as the world's first superpower? Henry Kamen's impressive new book offers a fresh and highly original answer.

Empire is a global survey of the two and a half centuries (from the late fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth) in which the Spaniards established the most extensive empire the world had ever known, ranging from Naples and the Netherlands to the Philippines. Unlike previous accounts, which have presented the Empire as a direct consequence of Spanish power, this provocative work of history emphasizes the inability of Spain to run an imperial enterprise by itself. The role of conquest was deceptive. Spain's rise to power was actually made possible by the collaboration of international business interests, including Italian financiers, German technicians and Dutch traders, in the task of setting up networks of contact ranging across the oceans. At the height of its apparent power, the Spanish Empire was in reality a global enterprise in which non-Spaniards -- Portuguese, Basque, Aztec, Genoese, Chinese, Flemish, West African, Incan and Neapolitan -- played an essential role. It is this vast diversity of resources and people (which included many of its greatest adventurers and soldiers) that made Spain's power so overwhelming.

There is no better account in English of this time. Henry Kamen's book provides a highly relevant analysis of the origins and nature of imperial power, and of global economic activity. Challenging, persuasive and unique in its thesis, Empire explores Spain's complex impact on world history with admirable clarity and intelligence.

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