**The West and “The New World”: Ferguson’s View:**

Our story begins with two ships. On one, landing in northern Ecuador in 1532, were fewer than 200 Spaniards accompanying the man who already claimed the title ‘Governor of Peru’. Their ambition was to conquer the Inca Empire for the King of Spain and to secure a large share of its reputed wealth of precious metal for themselves.

The other ship, the *Carolina*, reached the New World 138 years later, in 1670, at an island off the coast of what today is South Carolina. Among those on board were servants whose modest ambition was to find a better life than the grinding poverty they had left behind in England.

The two ships symbolized this tale of two Americas. On one, conquistadors; on the other indentured servants. One group dreamt of instant plunder – of mountains of Mayan gold, there for the taking. The others knew that they had years of toil ahead of them, but also that they would be rewarded with one of the world’s most attractive assets – prime North American land – plus a share in the process of law-making. Real estate plus representation: that was the North American dream.

The Spaniards appeared to be laying the foundation for an entirely new and spectacular civilization, to be run from a few splendid cities by a tiny, wealthy Spanish-born elite. And those cities grew rapidly. Mexico City had 100,000 inhabitants in 1692, at a time when Boston had barely 6,000. Twenty-five Spanish American universities were founded, like the one at Santo Domingo, which predates Harvard by nearly a century. The sciences of cartography and metallurgy flourished. The Spaniards learned to enjoy at least some of the staples of Meso-American cuisine: chillies, peanuts, potatoes and turkeys (all later adopted by North Americans). Hundreds of lavishly adorned churches were built, and some of the most imposing cathedrals in the world, like the magnificent one at Cuzco designed by the architect Francisco Becerra and completed in 1669 by the Flemish Jesuit Juan Bautista Egidiano. Franciscans as well as Jesuits flocked to South America in their thousands to convert what remained of the indigenous population. But while the Church was influential, ultimate power resided with the Spanish Crown. And, crucially, the Crown owned all the land. The story of property-ownership in North America would be altogether different.

In 1670 a penniless young English couple stepped off the first ship to land on the shores of South Carolina, after a harrowing transatlantic journey. Like her travelling companion Abraham Smith, Millicent How had signed herself into service with a standard deed of indenture … Between 65 and 80 per cent of all the Britons who came to the Chesapeake in the course of the seventeenth century did so on this basis. That was by no means exceptional. Fully three-quarters of all European migrants to British America over the entire colonial period came as indentured servants

The Spaniards had literally found mountains of silver in Mexico and Peru. All there seemed to be on the shores of Carolina was a bone-yard of bleached tree-trunks. This was no El Dorado. Instead, settlers in North America had to plant corn to eat and tobacco to trade. For many years Britain’s American colonies remained a patchwork of farms and villages, with a few towns and virtually no true cities. And here the natives, though less numerous, were not so easily subjugated.

What if it had been the other way around? What if New England had been in Mexico and New Spain in Massachusetts?

(This was to be one of) history’s biggest natural experiments: take two Western cultures, export them and impose them on a wide range of different peoples and lands – the British in the North, the Spanish and Portuguese in the South. Then see which does better.

It was no contest. Looking at the world today, four centuries on, no one could possibly doubt that the dominant force in Western civilization is the United States of America. Until very recently, Latin America has lagged far behind Anglo-America. How and why did that happen? You might think it was because the northern soil was more fertile or had more gold and oil beneath it, or because the weather was better, or because the rivers were more propitiously located – or just because Europe was geographically closer.

But these were not the keys to North American success. Nor can it be claimed that the Spanish Empire – or the Portuguese – was afflicted with the defects of the great Oriental empires. Unlike the Chinese, the Spaniards were early participants in the global trade boom after 1500.

Some people make the mistake of calling that idea ‘democracy’ and imagining that any country can adopt it merely by holding elections. In reality, democracy was the capstone of an edifice that had as its foundation the rule of law – to be precise, the sanctity of individual freedom and the security of private property rights, ensured by representative, constitutional government.