

When Columbus sailed west in 1492, all of Europe acknowledged the thousand-year-old supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church and its pope in Rome. The brutal efforts of the Spanish to convert native peoples to **Roman Catholicism** illustrated the murderous intensity with which European Christians embraced religious life in the sixteenth century. Spiritual concerns inspired, comforted, and united them. People fervently believed in heaven and hell, devils and witches, demons and angels, magic and miracles. And they were willing to kill and die for their beliefs.

## MARTIN LUTHER

The enforced unity of Catholic Europe began to crack in 1517, when Martin Luther, a thirty-three-year-old German priest who taught at the University of Wittenburg, changed the course of history by launching what became known as the **Protestant Reformation**.

Luther was a genuine spiritual revolutionary who undermined the authority of the Catholic Church by showing that many of its officials were corrupt. He called the pope “the greatest thief and robber that has appeared or can appear on earth” and denounced the Catholic Church as “the kingdom of sin, death, and hell.”

**LUTHER’S BELIEFS** Luther especially criticized the sale of *indulgences* (whereby priests would forgive sins in exchange for money or goods). God alone, through Christ, he insisted, offered people salvation; people could not earn it through their good deeds or buy it from priests. Salvation, in other words, resulted from belief. “Christ is the only Savior. One does not save oneself.” As Luther exclaimed, “By faith alone are you saved!”

Luther tried to democratize Christianity by centering faith on the individual believer rather than in the authority of the church and its priests. He urged believers to read the Bible themselves rather than blindly follow the dictates of Catholic priests and the distant pope. The people, he claimed, represented a “priesthood of all believers,” perhaps his most revolutionary idea. To help Germans be their own “priests,” Luther produced the first Bible in a German translation, and he reassured Christians that God was not an angry judge but a forgiving father.

**THE CATHOLIC REACTION** Lutheranism exploded Catholic assumptions and certainties like a bomb. Angry Catholic officials lashed out at Luther’s “dangerous doctrines.” Luther fought back with equal fury, declaring

that he was “born to war.” When Pope Leo X expelled Luther (a “wild boar”) from the Catholic Church in 1521 and sentenced him to death, civil war erupted throughout the German principalities. Amid the fighting, a powerful German prince protected Luther from the Church’s wrath.

What had begun as a fierce religious drama now became a political reformation, too. Luther was no longer simply an outspoken priest; he was a spiritual revolutionary, a folk hero, and a political prophet, encouraging German princes and dukes to separate themselves from the Italian papacy.

The wars of the Reformation were especially brutal conflicts involving tortures and burnings of believers from both sides of the religious divide. A settlement between warring Lutherans and Catholics did not come until 1555, when each prince was allowed by the Treaty of Augsburg to determine the religion of his subjects.

## JOHN CALVIN

Soon after Martin Luther began his revolt against the shortcomings of Catholicism, Swiss Protestants also challenged papal authority. They were led by John Calvin (1509–1564), a brilliant French scholar who had fled Catholic France to more tolerant Geneva and brought the Swiss city under the sway of his powerful beliefs.

**CALVINISM** In his great theological work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), Calvin set forth a stern doctrine. All Christians, he taught, were damned by Adam’s original sin, but Christ’s sacrifice on the cross made possible the redemption of those whom God “elected” to be saved and thus had “predestined” to salvation from the beginning of time.

Intoxicated by godliness, Calvin insisted that a true Christian life practiced strict morality and hard work. Moreover, he taught that God valued every form of work, however lowly it might be. Calvin also permitted church members a share in the governance through a body of elders and ministers called the presbytery. Calvin’s doctrines formed the basis for the German Reformed Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Presbyterians in Scotland, some of the Puritans in England (and, eventually, in America), and the Huguenots in France.

**CALVIN’S IMPACT** Through these and other Protestant groups, John Calvin exerted a greater influence upon religious belief and practice in the English colonies than did any other leader of the Reformation. His insistence on the freedom of individual believers, as well as his recognition that monarchs and political officials were sinful like everyone else, helped contribute

to the evolving ideas of representative democracy, whereby the people elected their rulers, and of the importance of separating church power from state (governmental) power.

## THE PROTESTANT REVOLUTION

Even though the Catholic Church launched an aggressive Counter-Reformation, the Protestant revolt continued to spread rapidly during the sixteenth century. Most of northern Germany, along with Scandinavia, became Lutheran; the areas that did so often called themselves the "Protesting Estates," from which came the label "Protestants."

The Reformation thus formed in part a theological dispute, in part a political movement, and in part a catalyst for social change, civil strife, and imperial warfare. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Catholics and Protestants persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and killed each other in large numbers in Europe—and in the Americas.

Every major international conflict involved, to some extent, a religious holy war between Catholic and Protestant nations. Equally important, the Protestant worldview, with its emphasis on the freedom of the individual conscience and personal Bible reading, would play a major role in the colonization of America.

**THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND** In England, the Reformation followed a unique course, blending aspects of Protestantism with Catholicism. The Church of England, or the Anglican Church, emerged through a gradual process of integrating Calvinism with English Catholicism. In early modern England, the church and government were united and mutually supportive. The monarchy required people to attend religious services and to pay taxes to support the church. The English rulers also supervised the church officials: two archbishops, twenty-six bishops, and thousands of parish clergy. The royal rulers often instructed religious leaders to preach sermons in support of particular government policies. As one English king explained, "People are governed by the pulpit more than the sword in time of peace."

**KING HENRY VIII** Purely political reasons initially led to the rejection of papal authority in England. Brilliant and energetic Henry VIII ruled between 1509 and 1547. The second monarch of the Tudor dynasty, he had won from the pope the title Defender of the Faith for refuting Martin Luther's rebellious ideas. Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, his brother's widow, had produced no male heir, however, and for him to marry again required that

he convince the pope to annul, or cancel, his marriage. Catherine, however, was the aunt of Charles V, king of Spain and ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, whose support was vital to the church in Rome.

The pope refused to grant an annulment. Henry angrily responded by severing England's nearly 900-year-old connection with the Catholic Church. He then named a new archbishop of Canterbury, who granted the annulment, thus freeing Henry to marry his mistress, the lively Anne Boleyn.

In one of history's greatest ironies, Anne Boleyn gave birth not to the male heir that Henry demanded but to a remarkable daughter named Elizabeth. The disappointed king took vengeance on his wife. He accused her of adultery, ordered her beheaded, and declared the infant Elizabeth a bastard. Yet Elizabeth received a first-rate education and grew up to be quick-witted and nimble, cunning and courageous.

**THE REIGN OF ELIZABETH** After the bloody reigns of her Protestant half brother, Edward VI, and her Catholic half sister, Mary I, she ascended the throne in 1558, at the age of twenty-five. Over the next forty-five years, Elizabeth proved to be the greatest female ruler in history. Her long reign over the troubled island kingdom was punctuated by frequent political turmoil, religious strife between Protestants and Catholics, economic crises, and foreign wars. Yet Queen Elizabeth came to rule confidently over England's golden age.

Born into a traditionally man's world and given a traditionally man's role, Elizabeth could not be a Catholic, for her birth was illegitimate. During her long reign, from 1558 to 1603, therefore, the Church of England became Protestant, but in its own way. The Anglican organizational structure, centered on bishops and archbishops, remained much the same as the Roman Catholic Church, but the church service changed; the clergy were permitted to marry; and the pope's authority was no longer recognized.

## THE SPANISH EMPIRE

During the sixteenth century, Spain was creating the world's most powerful empire at the same time it was trying to repress the Protestant Reformation. At its height, Spain controlled much of Europe, most of the Americas, parts of Africa, and various trading outposts in Asia.

But it was the gold and silver looted from the Americas that fueled Spain's "Golden Empire." By plundering, conquering, and colonizing the Americas



and converting and enslaving its inhabitants, the Spanish planted Christianity in the Western Hemisphere and gained the resources to rule the world.

**SPAIN IN THE CARIBBEAN** The Caribbean Sea served as the gateway through which Spanish power entered the Americas. After establishing colonies on Hispaniola, including Santo Domingo, which became the capital of the West Indies, the Spanish proceeded eastward to Puerto Rico (1508) and westward to Cuba (1511–1514). Their motives, as one soldier explained, were “to serve God and the king, and also to get rich.”

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), a Catholic priest whose father sailed with Columbus, described the native Cubans as generally peaceful people who lived in large communal wood buildings roofed with palm fronds. “Marriage laws,” he explained, “are non-existent: men and women alike choose their mates and leave them as they please, without offense, jealousy, or anger.”

Native Cubans wore colorful feathers on their heads, fashioned bead necklaces from fish bones and shells, and “put no value on gold and other precious things.” They lived lives of simple sufficiency, relying solely on nature for their basic needs.

Las Casas noted with regret that the Spaniards “committed irreparable crimes against the Indians.” Soldiers “thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting off slices of them to test the sharpness of their blades.” Cuban men were forced to work full-time in the mountains digging for gold while their wives stayed behind to tend vast fields of *cassava*, a starchy root vegetable known as the “bread of the tropics.”

Within a few years after the arrival of Europeans, most of the Indians throughout the Caribbean had died. Disunity everywhere—civil disorder, rebellion, and tribal warfare—left them vulnerable to foreign conquest. Attacks by well-armed soldiers and deadly germs from Europe overwhelmed entire Indian societies.

## A CLASH OF CULTURES

The often-violent relationship between the Spanish and Indians involved more than a clash between different peoples. It also involved contrasting forms of technological development. The Indians of Mexico used wooden canoes for transportation, while the Europeans crossed the ocean in heavily armed sailing vessels. The Spanish, with their steel swords, firearms, explosives, and armor, terrified most Indians, whose arrows and tomahawks were seldom a match for guns, cannons, and warhorses. A Spanish priest in Florida observed

that gunpowder “frightens the most valiant and courageous Indian and renders him slave to the white man’s command.”

The Europeans enjoyed other cultural advantages. Before their arrival, for example, the only domesticated four-legged animals in North America were dogs and llamas. The Spanish brought with them strange beasts: horses, pigs, sheep, and cattle. Horses provided greater speed in battle and gave the Spanish a decided psychological advantage. “The most essential thing in new lands is horses,” reported one Spanish soldier. “They instill the greatest fear in the enemy and make the Indians respect the leaders of the army.” Even more feared among the Indians were the fighting dogs that the Spanish used to guard their camps.

**CORTÉS’S CONQUEST** The most dramatic European conquest on the North American mainland occurred in Mexico. On February 18, 1519, thirty-four-year-old Hernán Cortés, driven by dreams of gold and glory, set sail for Mexico from Cuba. His fleet of eleven ships carried nearly 600 soldiers and sailors. Also on board were 200 indigenous Cubans, sixteen horses, and cannons.

After the invaders landed on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, Cortés convinced the Totomacs, a society conquered by the Mexica, to join his assault against the dominant Mexica, their hated rivals. To prevent any of his heavily armed and helmeted soldiers, called *conquistadores* (conquerors), from retreating or deserting, Cortés had the ships dismantled.

Conquistadores were then widely recognized as the best soldiers in the world, loyal to the monarchy and the Catholic Church. They received no pay; they were pitiless professional warriors willing to risk their lives for a share in the expected plunder. One conquistador explained that he went to America “to serve God and His Majesty, to give light to those who were in darkness, and to grow rich, as men desire to do.”

With his small army, cannons, horses, and Indian allies, Cortés brashly set out to conquer the sprawling Mexica (Aztec) Empire, which extended from central Mexico to what is today Guatemala. The nearly 200-mile march of Cortés’s army through the mountains to the magnificent Mexica capital of Tenochtitlán (modern Mexico City) took nearly three months. Along the way, Cortés used treachery and terror to intimidate and then recruit the native peoples, most of whom had been conquered earlier by the Mexica.

After entering the city of Cholula, home to the largest pyramid in the Americas (as well as 40,000 people), Cortés learned of a plot to ambush his army. He turned the tables on his hosts by inviting the local chieftains and nobles to the city’s ceremonial plaza to talk and exchange gifts. When they

arrived, however, the Spanish and their Indian allies, the Tlaxcalans, killed the leaders as well as thousands of other Cholulans.

**SPANISH INVADERS** As Cortés and his invading army continued their march across Mexico, they heard fabulous accounts of the carefully planned Mexica city of Tenochtitlán. With some 200,000 inhabitants, it was larger than most European cities. Graced by wide canals and bridges, stunning gardens, and formidable stone pyramids, the lake-encircled city and its stone buildings seemed impregnable.

One of the Spanish conquistadores described their first glimpse of the great capital city: “Gazing on such wonderful sights we did not know what to say or whether what appeared before us was real; for on the one hand there were great cities and in the lake ever so many more, and the lake itself was crowded with canoes, and in the causeway were many bridges at intervals, and in front of us stood the great City of Mexico, and we—we did not number even four hundred soldiers!”

Yet the vastly outnumbered Spanish made the most of their assets—their fighting experience, superior weapons, numerous Indian allies, and an aggressive sense of religious and racial superiority. Through a combination of threats and deceptions, the invaders entered Tenochtitlán peacefully and captured the



**Cortés in Mexico** Page from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, a historical narrative from the sixteenth century. The scene, in which Cortés is shown seated on a throne, depicts the arrival of the Spanish in Tlaxcala.

emperor, Montezuma II. Cortés explained to the emperor why the invasion was necessary: “We Spaniards have a disease of the heart that only gold can cure.” Montezuma submitted in part because he mistook Cortés for a god.

After taking the Mexicas’ gold and silver, sending 20 percent of it to the Spanish king (referred to as “the royal fifth”), and dividing the rest among themselves, the Spanish forced the native Mexicans to mine more of the precious metals.

Then, in the spring of 1520, disgruntled Mexica decided that Montezuma was a traitor. They rebelled, stoned him to death, and, armed only with swords and wicker shields, they attacked the conquistadores. Forced to retreat, the Spaniards lost about a third of their men.

The Spaniards’ 20,000 Indian allies remained loyal, however, and Cortés’s forces gradually regrouped. They surrounded the imperial city (“the most beautiful city in the world,” said Cortés) for eighty-five days, cutting off its access to water and food and allowing a highly infectious smallpox epidemic to devastate the inhabitants. Bernal Diaz del Castillo, a Spanish soldier, recalled that “God saw fit to send the Indians small pox.” One of the Mexica reported that the smallpox “spread over the people as great destruction. Some it covered on all parts—their faces, their heads, their breasts, and so on. There was great havoc. Very many died of it. . . . They could not move; they could not stir.”

For three months, the Mexica bravely defended their capital. Then the siege came to a bloody end. The ravages of smallpox and the support of thousands of anti-Aztec Indians help explain how such a small force of determined Spaniards was able to vanquish a proud nation of nearly 1 million people.

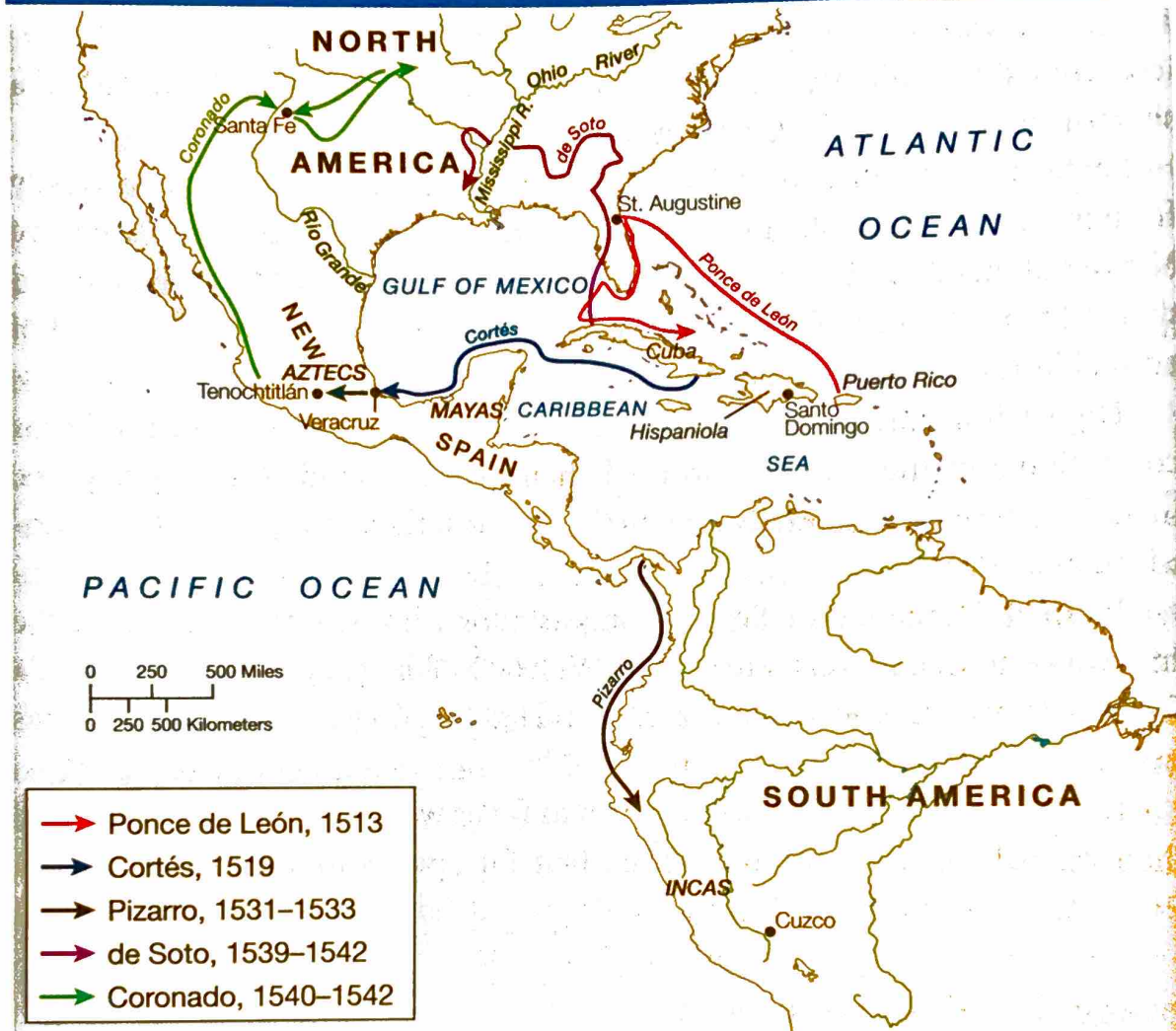
After the Aztecs surrendered, a merciless Cortés ordered the leaders hanged and the priests devoured by dogs. He reported that, in the end, 117,000 Aztecs were killed.

In two years, Cortés and his disciplined army and Indian allies had conquered a fabled empire that had taken centuries to develop. Cortés became the first governor of New Spain and began replacing the Mexica leaders with Spanish bureaucrats and church officials. The Spanish conquest of Mexico established the model for waves of plundering conquistadores to follow. Within twenty years, Spain had established a vast empire in the New World.

In 1531, Francisco Pizarro led a band of conquistadores down the Pacific coast of South America from Panama toward Peru, where they brutally subdued the huge Inca Empire. The Spanish invaders seized Inca palaces, took royal women as mistresses and wives, and looted the empire of its gold and



**SPANISH EXPLORATIONS OF THE MAINLAND**



- What were the Spanish conquistadores' goals for exploring the Americas?
- How did Cortés conquer the Aztecs?
- Why did the Spanish first explore North America, and why did they establish St. Augustine, the first European settlement in what would become the United States?

silver. From Peru, Spain extended its control southward through Chile by about 1553 and north, to present-day Colombia, by 1538.

**SPANISH EXPLORERS** Throughout the sixteenth century, the Spanish expanded their control over much of North America, bullying and brutalizing, looting and destroying the native peoples, then forcing them to work the mines and plantations in return for learning the Spanish language and embracing the Catholic religion.



Juan Ponce de León, then governor of Puerto Rico, made the earliest-known exploration of what the Spanish called La Florida—the Land of Flowers—in 1513. Meanwhile, other Spanish explorers skirted the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, scouted the Atlantic coast all the way north to Canada, and established a short-lived colony on the Carolina coast.

Sixteenth-century knowledge of the North American interior came mostly from would-be conquistadores who plundered the region. The first, Pánfilo de Narváez, landed in 1528 at Tampa Bay, marched northward to Alabama, and then returned to the Gulf coast, where he and his crew built crude boats out of animal hides and headed for Mexico.

High winds and heavy seas, however, wrecked the vessels on the Texas coast. Some of the survivors worked their way overland. After *eight* years, including periods of captivity among the Indians, they wandered into a Spanish outpost in Mexico.

In 1539, Hernando de Soto, a conquistador who had helped conquer the Incas in Peru, set out to explore Florida. With 600 soldiers, a pair of women, and a few priests, as well as horses, mules, pigs, and fighting dogs, he landed on Florida's west coast.

De Soto and his party traveled north as far as western North Carolina, and then moved westward, becoming the first Europeans to see the Mississippi River. Along the way, they looted and destroyed Native American villages, and took enslaved Indians with them in chains and iron collars. De Soto tried to impress the Indians by claiming to be “a son of the sun.”

In the spring of 1542, having wandered America for three years, de Soto died near Natchez, Mississippi. The next year, the survivors among his party floated down the Mississippi River, and 311 of the original adventurers found their way to Spanish Mexico. They left behind them a trail of infectious diseases which continued to ravage the Indians for years thereafter.

In 1540, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado led an expedition of 1,500 Spaniards and Indian allies, 1,000 horses, 500 cattle, and 5,000 sheep northward into New Mexico and northeast as far as present-day Kansas.

**NEW SPAIN** The Spanish established provinces in North America not so much as commercial enterprises but as protective buffers to defend their empire in Mexico and South America. They were concerned about French traders infiltrating from Louisiana, English settlers crossing into Florida, and Russian seal hunters wandering down the California coast.

As the sixteenth century unfolded, the Spanish shifted from looting the native peoples to enslaving them. To reward the crusading conquistadores,

Spain transferred to America a medieval socioeconomic system known as the *encomienda*, whereby favored army officers were given huge parcels of land. They were to provide the Indians with protection in exchange for “tribute”—goods and labor, tending farms or mining for gold and silver.

New Spain therefore developed a society of extremes: wealthy *encomenderos* and powerful priests at one end of the spectrum, and Indians held in poverty at the other. The Spaniards used brute force to ensure that Indians accepted their new role as serfs. Nuño de Guzman, a conquistador who became the governor of a Mexican province, loved to watch his massive fighting dog tear apart rebellious Indians. After a Spaniard talked back to him, he had the man nailed to a post by his tongue.

**A CATHOLIC EMPIRE** The Spanish (and later the French) launched a massive effort to convert the Indians (deeming them “heathens”) into Catholic servants. During the sixteenth century, hundreds of priests fanned out across New Spain (and, later, New France).

Many of the Catholic missionaries decided that the Indians of Mexico could be converted only by force. “Though they seem to be a simple people,” a Spanish priest declared in 1562, “they are up to all sorts of mischief, and



**Missionaries in the “New World”** A Spanish mission in New Mexico, established to spread the Catholic faith among the indigenous peoples.

are obstinately attached to the rituals and ceremonies of their forefathers. The whole land is certainly damned, and without compulsion, they will never speak the [religious] truth." By the end of the sixteenth century, there were more than 300 monasteries or missions in New Spain, and Catholicism had become a major instrument of Spanish imperialism.

Some Spanish officials criticized the forced conversion of Indians and the *encomienda* system. In 1514, the Catholic priest Bartolomé de Las Casas resolved to spend the rest of his life aiding the Indians. He gave away his land in Hispaniola, freed his slaves, and began urging the Spanish to change their approach: "Everything done to the Indians thus far," he claimed, "was unjust and tyrannical."

Las Casas spent the next fifty years advocating better treatment for indigenous people. He was officially named "Protector of the Indians." Las Casas insisted that the Indians be converted to Catholicism only through "peaceful and reasonable" means. His courageous efforts aroused furious opposition, however. Most colonizers believed, as a Spanish bishop in Mexico declared in 1585, that the Indians must be "ruled, governed, and guided" to Christianity "by fear more than by love."

A leading Spanish scholar, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, directly challenged Las Casas's cry for justice. Indians, he claimed, are as inferior "as children are to adults, as women are to men, as different from Spaniards as cruel people are from mild people."

Over time, however, Las Casas convinced the monarchy and the Catholic Church to issue new rules calling for better treatment of the Indians in New Spain. At Las Casas's urging, Pope Paul III declared that Indians were human beings deserving of respect and Christian salvation. Still, the use of "fire and the sword" continued, and angry colonists on Hispaniola banished Las Casas.

On returning to Spain, Las Casas said, "I left Christ in the Indies not once, but a thousand times beaten, afflicted, insulted and crucified by those Spaniards who destroy and ravage the Indians." In 1564, two years before his death, he bleakly predicted that "God will wreak his fury and anger against Spain some day for the unjust wars waged against the Indians."

## THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

The first European contacts with the Western Hemisphere began the **Columbian Exchange** (also called the Great Biological Exchange), a worldwide transfer of plants, animals, and diseases that ultimately worked in favor of the Europeans at the expense of the indigenous peoples.

The plants and animals of the two worlds differed more than the peoples and their ways of life. Europeans had never encountered iguanas, bison, cougars, armadillos, opossums, sloths, tapirs, anacondas, condors, or hummingbirds. Nor had the Native Americans seen horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, and rats, which soon flooded the Americas.

**THE EXCHANGE OF PLANTS AND FOODS** The exchange of plant life between the Western Hemisphere and Europe/Africa transformed the diets of both regions. Before Columbus's voyage, three foods were unknown in Europe: maize (corn), potatoes (sweet and white), and many kinds of beans (snap, kidney, lima, and others). The white potato, although commonly called Irish, is actually native to South America. Explorers brought it back to Europe, where it thrived.

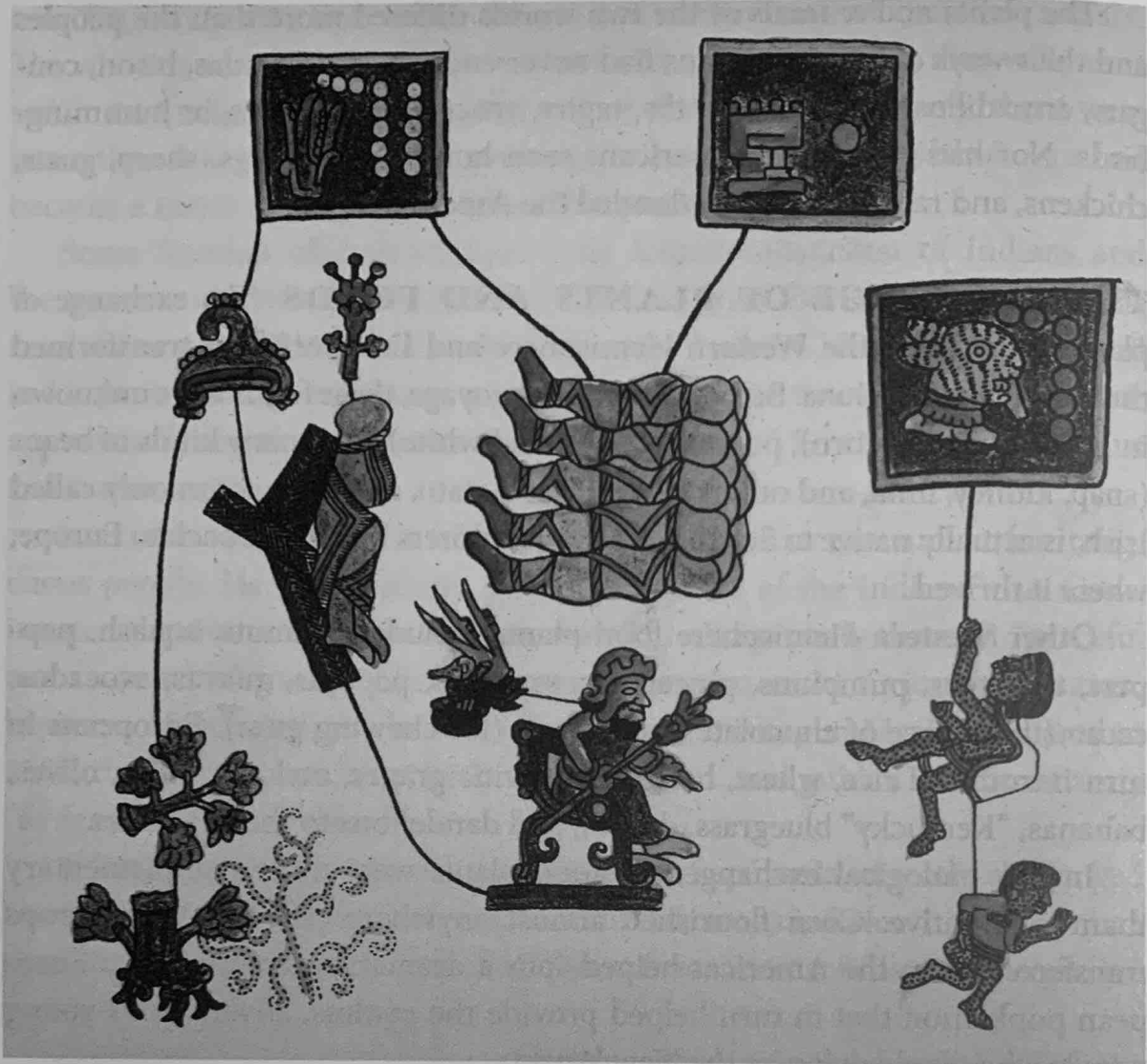
Other Western Hemisphere food plants included peanuts, squash, peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins, pineapples, saffras, papayas, guavas, avocados, cacao (the source of chocolate), and chicle (for chewing gum). Europeans in turn introduced rice, wheat, barley, oats, wine grapes, melons, coffee, olives, bananas, "Kentucky" bluegrass, daisies, and dandelions to the Americas.

In this biological exchange, the food plants were more complementary than competitive. Corn flourished almost anywhere. The new food crops transferred from the Americas helped spur a dramatic increase in the European population that in turn helped provide the restless, adventurous young people who would colonize the New World.

**AN EXCHANGE OF DISEASES** The most significant aspect of the biological exchange, however, was not food crops but the transmission of **infectious diseases**. During the three centuries after Columbus's first voyage, Europeans and enslaved Africans brought with them deadly diseases that Native Americans had never encountered: smallpox, typhus, diphtheria, bubonic plague, malaria, yellow fever, and cholera.

The results were catastrophic. Far more Indians—tens of millions—died from infections than from combat. Smallpox was an especially ghastly killer. In central Mexico alone, some 8 million people, perhaps a third of the entire Indian population, died of smallpox within a decade of the arrival of the Spanish. A Spanish explorer noted that half the Indians died from smallpox and "blamed us." Often there were not enough survivors to bury the dead; Europeans arrived at villages to discover only rotting corpses strewn everywhere.

Unable to explain or cure the diseases, Native American chieftains and religious leaders often lost their stature—and their lives, as they were



**Smallpox** Aztec victims of the 1538 smallpox epidemic are covered in shrouds (center) as two others lie dying (at right).

usually the first to meet the Spanish and thus were the first infected. As a consequence of losing their leaders, the indigenous peoples were less capable of resisting the European invaders. Many Europeans, however, interpreted such epidemics as diseases sent by God to punish those who resisted conversion to Christianity.

## THE SPANISH IN NORTH AMERICA

Throughout the sixteenth century, no European power other than Spain held more than a brief foothold in what would become the United States. By the time the English established Jamestown in Virginia in 1607, the Spanish had



already explored the Smoky Mountains and the Great Plains, and established colonies in the Southwest and Florida.

Spain had the advantage not only of having arrived first but also of having stumbled onto those regions that would produce the quickest profits. While France and England were preoccupied with political disputes and religious conflicts, Spain had forged an intense national unity that enabled it to dominate Europe as well as the New World.

## ST. AUGUSTINE

The first Spanish outpost in the continental United States emerged in response to the French. In the 1560s, spirited French Protestants (called Huguenots) established France's first American colonies, one on the coast of what became South Carolina and the other in Florida. They did not last long.

In 1565, the Spanish founded St. Augustine, on the Atlantic coast of Florida. It became the first European town in the present-day United States. It included a fort, church, hospital, fish market, and more than 100 shops and houses—all built decades before the first English settlements in America.

In September 1565, Spanish soldiers from St. Augustine assaulted Fort Caroline, the French Huguenot colony in northeastern Florida, and hanged all the men over age fifteen. The Spanish commander notified his Catholic king that he had killed all the French he "had found [in Fort Caroline] because . . . they were scattering the odious Lutheran doctrine in these Provinces." Later, when survivors from a shipwrecked French fleet washed ashore on Florida beaches after a hurricane, the Spanish commander told them they must abandon Protestantism and swear their allegiance to Catholicism. When they refused, he killed 245 of them.

## THE SPANISH SOUTHWEST

The Spanish eventually established other permanent settlements in what are now New Mexico, Texas, and California. From the outset, in sharp contrast to the later English experience, the Spanish settlements were sparsely populated, inadequately supplied, and dreadfully poor. These northernmost regions of New Spain were so far from the capital in Mexico City that they were regularly neglected.

The Spanish colonies in America were extensions of the monarchy's absolute power. Democratic ideals and notions of equal treatment were nonexistent; people were expected to follow orders. There was no freedom of speech

or religion or movement, no local elections, no real self-government. The military officers, bureaucrats, wealthy landowners, and priests appointed by the king to govern New Spain regulated every detail of colonial life. Settlers could not travel within the colonies without official permission.

**NEW MEXICO** The land that would later be called **New Mexico** was the first center of Catholic missionary activity in the American Southwest. In 1595, Juan de Oñate, the rich son of a Spanish mining family in Mexico, whose wife was a descendant of both Cortés and Montezuma II, received a land grant for *El Norte*, the mostly desert territory north of Mexico above the Rio Grande—Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and parts of Colorado. Over the next three years, he recruited an army of colonists willing to move north with him: soldier-settlers and hundreds of Mexican Indians and *mestizos* (the offspring of Spanish and indigenous parents).

In 1598, the caravan of colonists, including women, children, and 7,000 cattle, horses, goats, and sheep, began moving north from the mountains above Mexico City across the harsh desert landscape of parched mesas, plateaus, and canyons enlivened by lush river valleys. “O God! What a lonely land!” one of the footsore travelers wrote to relatives in Mexico City.

Upon crossing the Rio Grande at what became El Paso, Texas, Oñate claimed the entire region for the Spanish monarchy. Indians who resisted were killed. A priest recorded that Oñate “had butchered many Indians, human blood has been shed, and he has committed thefts, sackings, and other atrocities.”

After walking more than 800 miles in seven months, along ancient Indian footpaths that the Spanish settlers called the *Camino Real* (royal road), they established the colony of New Mexico, the farthest outpost of New Spain. The Spanish called the local Indians “Pueblos” (a Spanish word meaning village) for the city-like aspect of their terraced, multistoried buildings, sometimes chiseled into the walls of cliffs. They also dug out underground chambers called *kivas*, where they held religious ceremonies and stored sacred objects such as prayer sticks and feathered masks.

The Pueblos (mostly Hopis and Zunis) were farmers who used irrigation to water their crops. They were also skilled at making clay pottery and woven baskets. Some of the Native Americans wore buffalo skins, most wore decorative cotton blankets. “Their corn and vegetables,” Oñate reported, “are the best and largest to be found anywhere in the world.” Most of their customs resembled those practiced by the Mexicans. “Their government,” he noted, “is one of complete freedom, for although they have chieftains, they obey them badly and in few matters.”

Unlike the later English colonists in America, the Spanish officials did not view Native Americans as *racially* inferior. Instead, they believed that the Indians were “burdened” by *culturally* inferior ways of life. The Spanish government never intended to establish large colonies of Spanish immigrants in America.

The goal of Spanish colonialism was to force the Native Americans to adopt the Spanish way of life, from Catholicism to modes of dress, speech, work, and conduct. Oñate, New Mexico’s first governor, told the Pueblos that if they embraced Catholicism and followed his orders, they would receive “an eternal life of great bliss” instead of “cruel and everlasting torment.”

Oñate soon discovered that there was no gold or silver in New Mexico. Nor was there enough corn and beans to feed the Spanish invaders, who had to be resupplied by expensive caravans traveling for months from Mexico City.

So eventually Oñate established a system that forced the Indians to pay annual tributes (taxes) to the Spanish authorities in the form of a yard of cloth and a bushel of corn each year.

**CATHOLIC MISSIONS** Once it became evident that New Mexico had little gold, the Spanish focused their attention on religious conversion. Priests established Catholic missions where Indians were forced to work the fields they had once owned and perform personal tasks for the priests and soldiers, cooking, cleaning, and even providing sexual favors. Soldiers and priests used whips to herd the Indians to church services and to punish them for not working hard enough. A French visitor to a mission reported that it “reminded us of a . . . West Indian [slave] colony.”

After about ten years, a mission would be secularized, stripped of its religious role. Its lands would be divided among the converted Indians, the



**Cultural conflict** This Peruvian illustration, from a 1612–1615 manuscript by Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, shows a Dominican Catholic friar forcing a native woman to weave.

mission chapel would become a parish church, and the inhabitants would be given full Spanish citizenship—including the privilege of paying taxes. The soldiers who were sent to protect the missions were housed in *presidios*, or forts; their families and the merchants accompanying them lived in adjacent villages.

Some Indian peoples welcomed the Spanish missionaries as “powerful witches” capable of easing their burdens. Others tried to use the European invaders as allies against rival Indian groups. Still others rebelled. Before the end of New Mexico’s first year, in December 1598, the Acoma Pueblos revolted, killing eleven soldiers.

Oñate’s response to the rebellion was brutal. Over three days, Spanish soldiers destroyed the entire pueblo, killing 500 Pueblo men and 300 women and children. Survivors were enslaved. Twenty-four Pueblo men had one foot cut off to frighten others and keep them from escaping or resisting. Children were taken from their parents into a Catholic mission, where, Oñate remarked, “they may attain the knowledge of God and the salvation of their souls.”

**THE MESTIZO FACTOR** Spanish women were prohibited from traveling to the New World unless they were married and accompanied by a husband. This policy had unexpected consequences. There were so few Spanish women in North America that soldiers and settlers often married Native Americans or otherwise fathered mestizos.

By the eighteenth century, mestizos were a majority in Mexico and New Mexico. Such widespread intermarriage and interbreeding led the Spanish to adopt a more inclusive social outlook toward the Indians than the English later did in their colonies along the Atlantic coast. Once most colonial officials were mestizo themselves, they were less likely to belittle the Indians. At the same time, many Native Americans falsely claimed to be mestizo as a means of improving their status and avoiding having to pay annual tribute.

**THE PUEBLO REVOLT** The Spanish presence in New Mexico expanded slowly. In 1608, the government decided to turn New Mexico into a royal province and moved its capital to Santa Fe (“Holy Faith” in Spanish), the first permanent seat of government in the present-day United States. By 1630, there were fifty Catholic churches and monasteries in New Mexico as well as some 3,000 Spaniards. Roman Catholic missionaries in New Mexico claimed that 86,000 Pueblos had been converted to Christianity during the seventeenth century.

In fact, however, resentment among the Indians had increased as the Spanish stripped them of their ancestral ways of life. In 1680, a charismatic Indian

spiritual leader named Popé (meaning “Ripe Plantings”) organized a massive rebellion. The Spanish claimed that he had cast a magical spell over his people, making “them crazy.”

The Indians, painted for war, burned Catholic churches, tortured, mutilated, and executed priests; destroyed all relics of Christianity; and forced the 2,400 survivors to flee the region in humiliation, eventually making their way to El Paso. The entire province of New Mexico was again in Indian hands. The Spanish governor reported that the Pueblos “are very happy without religion or Spaniards.”

The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 was the greatest defeat that Indians ever inflicted on European efforts to conquer the New World. It took twelve years and four military assaults for the Spanish to reestablish control over New Mexico.

## HORSES AND THE GREAT PLAINS

Another major consequence of the Pueblo Revolt was the opportunity it gave Indian rebels to gain possession of thousands of Spanish horses (Spanish authorities had made it illegal for Indians to ride or own horses). Stealing horses became one of the most honored ways for warriors to prove their courage.

**HORSES AND INDIAN CULTURE** The Pueblos established a thriving horse trade with the Navajos, Apaches, and others. By 1690, horses were in Texas. They soon spread across the Great Plains, the vast rolling grasslands extending from the Missouri Valley in the east to the base of the Rocky Mountains in the west.

Prior to the arrival of European horses, Indians hunted on foot and used dogs as their beasts of burden. Dogs are carnivores, however, and it was always difficult to find enough meat to feed them.

The introduction of the horse changed everything. Horses provided the Plains Indians with a new source of mobility and power. The vast grasslands of the Great Plains were the perfect environment for horses, since the prairies offered plenty of forage for grazing animals. Horses could also haul up to seven times as much weight as dogs, and their speed and endurance made the indigenous people much more effective hunters and warriors. On the Great Plains, an Indian family’s status reflected the number of horses it owned.

By the late seventeenth century, Native American horsemen were fighting the Spaniards on more equal terms. This helps explain why the Indians of the Southwest and Texas, unlike the Indians in Mexico, were able to sustain their





**Plains Indians** The horse-stealing raid depicted in this hide painting demonstrates the essential role horses played in Plains life.

cultures for the next 300 years: on horseback, they were among the most fearsome fighters in the world.

**BISON HUNTING** Horses transformed the economy and ecology of the Great Plains. The Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, Kiowa, and Sioux reinvented themselves as horse-centered cultures. They left their traditional woodland villages on the fringes of the plains and became nomadic bison (buffalo) hunters. A male bison could weigh over a ton and stand five feet tall at the shoulder.

Indians used virtually every part of the bison they killed: meat for food; hides for clothing, shoes, bedding, and shelter; muscles and tendons for thread and bowstrings; intestines for containers; bones for tools; horns for eating utensils; hair for headdresses; and dung for fuel. They used tongues for hair brushes and tails for fly swatters. One scholar has referred to the bison as the “tribal department store.”

The night after a successful hunt, the Indians would stage a festival feast, with singing and dancing throughout the night. To preserve meat for later, it would be cut into long strips and hung over wooden racks to dry in the sun or over a fire. The dried meat was called jerky. Tougher cuts of buffalo meat would be pounded with a mallet and mixed with fat and berries to make *pemmican*.

Horses eased some of the physical burdens on women, but also imposed new demands. Women and girls tended to the horses, butchered and dried the bison meat, and tanned the hides. As the value of the bison hides grew, Indian hunters began practicing polygamy, primarily for economic reasons: more wives could process more bison carcasses. The rising value of wives eventually led Plains Indians to raid other tribes in search of captive brides.

The introduction of horses into the Great Plains was a mixed blessing. The horse brought prosperity and mobility to the Plains Indians but also triggered more conflict among them. Over time, the Indians on horseback eventually killed more bison than the herds could replace. Further, horses competed with the bison for food, often depleting the prairie grass. And, as Indians on horses traveled greater distances and encountered more people, infectious diseases spread more widely. Still, by 1800, a white trader in Texas would observe that "this is a delightful country, and were it not for perpetual wars, the natives might be the happiest people on earth."

## HISPANIC AMERICA

Spanish culture etched a lasting imprint upon American ways of life. Spain's colonial presence in the Americas lasted more than three centuries, much longer than either England's or France's.

New Spain was centered in Mexico, but its borders extended from Florida to Alaska. Hispanic place-names—San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tucson, Santa Fe, San Antonio, and St. Augustine—survive to this day, as do Hispanic influences in art, architecture, literature, music, law, and cuisine.

The Spanish encounters with Indians and their diverse cultures produced a two-way exchange by which the contrasting societies blended, coexisted, and interacted. Even when locked in mortal conflict and driven by hostility and mutual suspicion, the two cultures necessarily affected each other. In other words, New Spain, while savaged by violence, coercion, and intolerance, eventually produced a mutual accommodation with Native Americans that enabled two living traditions to persist side by side. The Spanish introduced cattle, horses, sheep, and goats to Texas, New Mexico, and California, as well as such words as *rodeo*, *bronco*, and *ranch* (*rancho*), and the names of four states: California, Colorado, Florida, and Nevada.

## CHALLENGES TO THE SPANISH EMPIRE

Catholic Spain's successful conquests in the Western Hemisphere spurred Portugal, France, England, and the Netherlands (Holland) to begin their own exploration and exploitation of the New World.

The French were the first to pose a serious threat. Spanish treasure ships sailing home from Mexico, Peru, and the Caribbean offered tempting targets for French pirates. In 1524, the French king sent Italian Giovanni da Verrazano westward across the Atlantic. Upon sighting land (probably at Cape Fear, North Carolina), Verrazano ranged along the coast as far north as Maine. On a second voyage, in 1528, he was killed by Carib Indians.

**NEW FRANCE** Unlike the Verrazano voyages, those of Jacques Cartier, beginning in the next decade, led to the first French effort at colonization in North America. During three voyages, Cartier explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence and ventured up the St. Lawrence River, now the boundary between Canada and New York. Twice he got as far as present-day Montreal, and twice he wintered at the site of Quebec, near which a short-lived French colony appeared in 1541–1542.

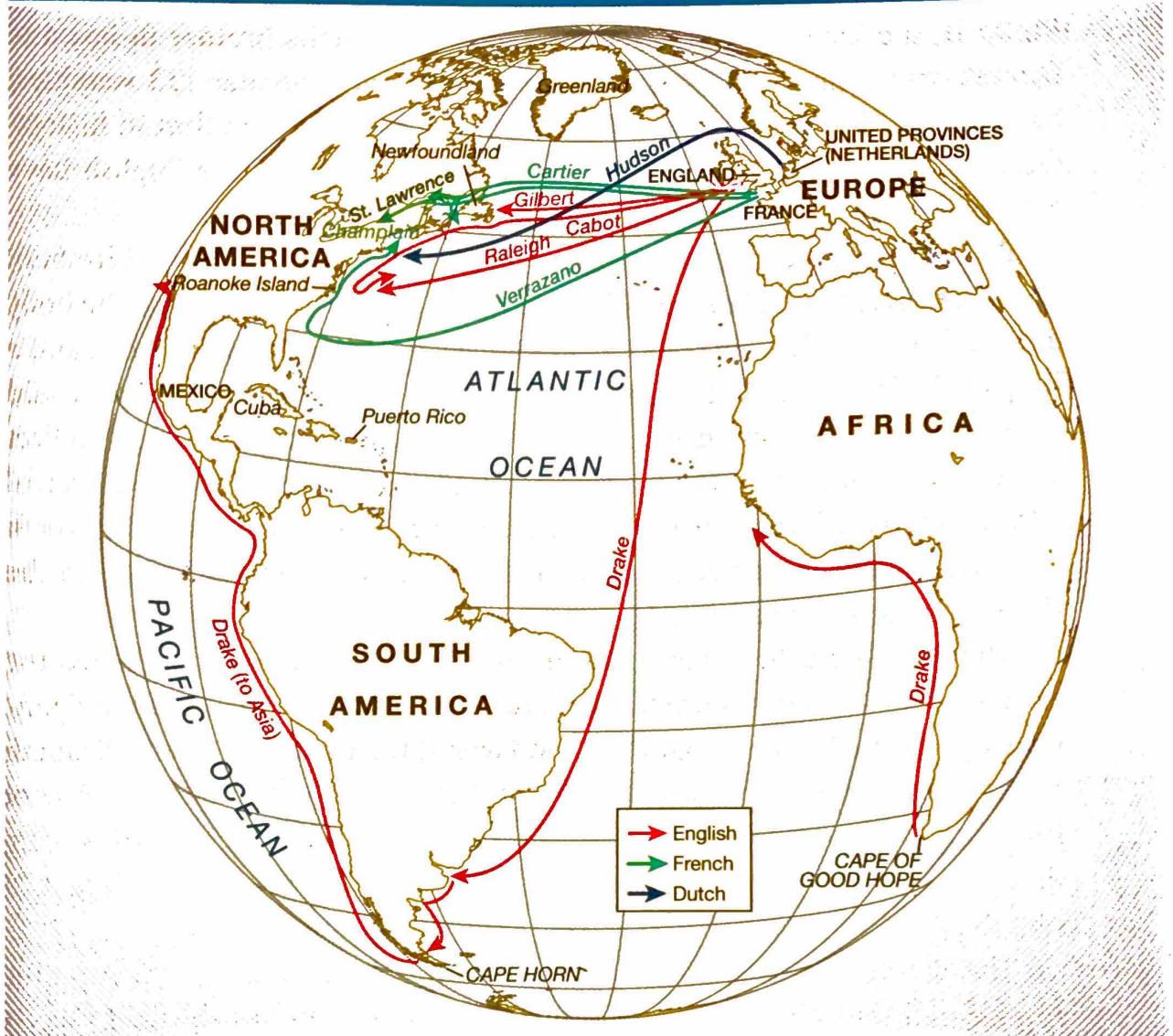
France after midcentury, however, plunged into religious civil wars, and the colonization of Canada had to await the coming of Samuel de Champlain, “the Father of New France,” after 1600. Champlain would lead twenty-seven expeditions from France to Canada during a thirty-seven-year period.

**THE DUTCH REVOLT** From the mid-1500s, greater threats to Spanish power in the New World arose from the Dutch and the English. In 1566, the Netherlands included seventeen provinces. The fragmented nation had passed by inheritance to the Spanish king in 1555, but the Dutch spurned Catholicism and had become largely Protestant (mostly Calvinists making up what was called the Dutch Reformed Church). During the second half of the sixteenth century, the Dutch began a series of sporadic rebellions against Spanish Catholic rule.

A long, bloody struggle for political independence and religious freedom ensued in which Protestant England aided the Dutch. The Dutch revolt, as much a civil war as a war for national independence, was not a single cohesive event but rather a series of different uprisings in different provinces at different times. Each province had its own institutions, laws, and rights. Although seven provinces joined together to form the Dutch Republic, the Spanish did not officially recognize the independence of the entire Netherlands until 1648.



## ENGLISH, FRENCH, AND DUTCH EXPLORATIONS



- Who were the first European explorers to rival Spanish dominance in the New World, and why did they cross the Atlantic?
- Why was the defeat of the Spanish Armada important to the history of English exploration?
- What was the significance of the voyages of Gilbert and Raleigh?

**THE DEFEAT OF THE ARMADA** Almost from the beginning of the Protestant revolt in the Netherlands, the Dutch captured Spanish treasure ships in the Atlantic and carried on illegal trade with Spain's colonies. While England's strong, skillful Queen Elizabeth steered a tortuous course to avoid open war with Spain, she encouraged both Dutch and English privateers to attack Spanish ships and their colonies in America.

The English raids on Spanish ships continued for some twenty years before open war erupted between the two nations. Determined to conquer England, Philip II, the king of Spain who was Queen Elizabeth's brother-in-law and fiercest opponent, assembled the massive **Spanish Armada**: 132 warships, 8,000 sailors, and 18,000 soldiers. It was the greatest invasion fleet in history. On May 28, 1588, the Armada began sailing for England. The English navy was waiting for them.

As the two fleets positioned themselves for the battle, Queen Elizabeth donned a silver breastplate and told the English forces, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a King of England too." As the battle unfolded, the heavy Spanish galleons could not compete with the speed and agility of the English warships. The English fleet chased the Spanish ships through the English Channel. Caught up in a powerful "Protestant wind" from the south, the Spanish fleet was swept into the North Sea. The decimated Armada limped home, finally scattering wreckage on the shores of Scotland and Ireland.

The stunning defeat of Spain's fearsome Armada greatly strengthened the Protestant cause across Europe. The ferocious storm that smashed the Spanish ships seemed to be a sign that God favored the English. Queen Elizabeth commissioned a special medallion to commemorate the successful defense of England. The citation read, "God blew and they were dispersed." Spain's King Philip seemed to agree. Upon learning of the catastrophic defeat, he sighed, "I sent the Armada against men, not God's winds and waves."

The defeat of the Spanish Armada confirmed England's naval supremacy, cleared the way for its colonization of America, and established Queen Elizabeth's stature as a great ruler. Although she had many suitors eager to marry her, she refused to divide her power. She would have "but one mistress [England] and no master." Eager to live and die a virgin, she married herself to the fate of England. By the end of the sixteenth century, Elizabethan England had begun an epic transformation from a poor, humiliated, and isolated nation into a mighty global empire.

## ENGLISH EXPLORATION OF AMERICA

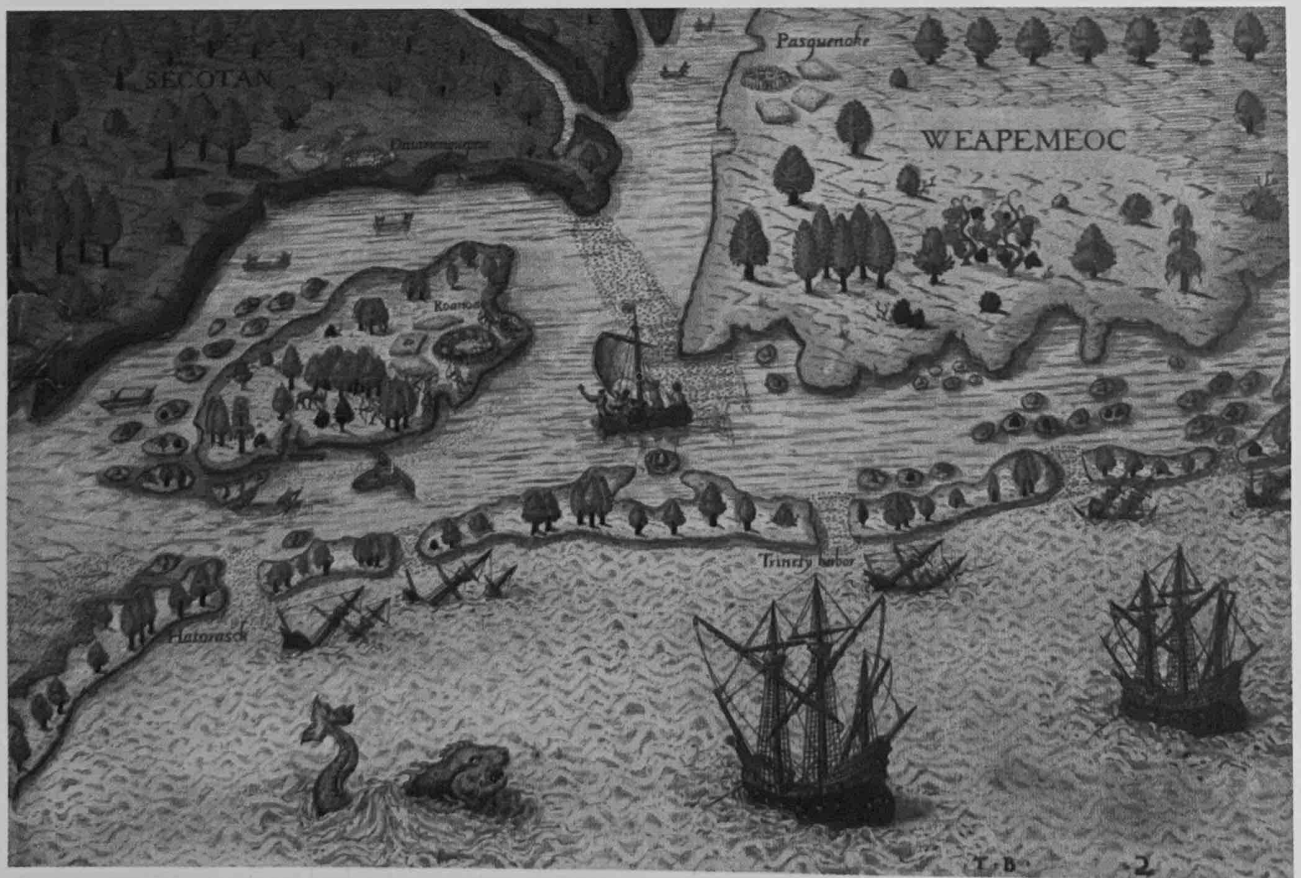
English efforts to colonize America began a few years before the great battle with the Spanish Armada. They were driven by a desire to weaken Spain's control over the Americas. In 1578, Queen Elizabeth had given Sir Humphrey Gilbert permission to establish a colony in the "remote heathen and barbarous lands" of America.



Gilbert's group set out in 1583, intending to settle near Narragansett Bay (in present-day Rhode Island). They instead landed in fogbound Newfoundland (Canada). With winter approaching and his largest vessels lost, Gilbert and the colonists returned home. While in transit, however, his ship vanished, and he was never seen again.

The next year, Queen Elizabeth asked Sir Walter Raleigh, Gilbert's much younger half-brother, to organize a colonizing mission. Raleigh's expedition discovered the Outer Banks of North Carolina and landed at Roanoke Island. One of the colonists reported that "the soile is the most plentiful, sweete, fruitfull and wholesome of all the worlde." In fact, however, the sandy soil of the Outer Banks was not good for farming. Raleigh named the area Virginia, in honor of childless Queen Elizabeth, the presumably "Virgin Queen," as she once described herself.

After several false starts, Raleigh in 1587 sponsored another expedition of about 100 colonists, including 26 women and children, led by Governor John White. White spent a month on Roanoke Island and then returned to England for supplies, leaving behind his daughter Elinor and his granddaughter Virginia Dare, the first English child born in the New World.



**The English in Virginia** The arrival of English explorers on the Outer Banks, with Roanoke Island at left.

White's journey back to Virginia was delayed because of the naval war with Spain. When he finally returned, in 1590, the Roanoke outpost had been abandoned and pillaged, much of it having been burned by a lightning-ignited fire. The rude cabins had been dismantled and removed, suggesting that the colonists had left intentionally. On a post at the entrance to the village, someone had carved the word "CROATOAN," leading White to conclude that the settlers had set out for the island of that name some 50 miles south, where friendly Indians lived.

The "lost colonists" were never found. They may have been killed by Indians or Spaniards. The most recent evidence indicates that the "Lost Colony" suffered from a horrible drought that prevented the colonists from growing enough food to survive. While some may have gone south, the main body of colonists appears to have gone north, to the southern shores of Chesapeake Bay, as they had talked of doing, and lived there for some years until they were killed by local Indians.

There were no English colonists in North America when Queen Elizabeth died in 1603. The Spanish controlled the only colonial outposts on the continent. But that was about to change. Inspired by the success of the Spanish in exploiting the New World, and emboldened by their defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the English—as well as the French and the Dutch—would soon develop American colonial empires of their own.

## NEW SPAIN IN DECLINE

During the one and a half centuries after 1492, the Spanish developed the most extensive, rich, and envied empire the world had ever known. It spanned southern Europe and the Netherlands, much of the Western Hemisphere, and parts of Asia.

The monarchy financed its imperial ambitions with riches looted from the Americas. Between 1545 and 1660, the Spanish forced Native Americans and Africans to mine 7 million pounds of silver in the New World, twice as much silver as existed in all of Europe in 1492. The massive amounts of silver and gold from the New World led Spanish kings to mobilize huge armies and the naval armada in an effort to conquer all of Protestant Europe.

Yet the Spanish rulers overreached themselves. The widespread religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries killed millions, created intense anti-Spanish feelings among the English and the Dutch, and eventually helped bankrupt the Spanish government. At the same time, the Spanish Empire grew so vast that its sprawling size and complexity eventually led to its disintegration.

During the sixteenth century, New Spain gradually developed into a settled society with the same rigid class structure of the home country. From the

outset, the Spanish in the Americas behaved more like occupying rulers than permanent settlers, carefully regulating every detail of colonial administration and life.

New Spain was an extractive empire, less interested in creating self-sustaining colonial communities than in taking gold, silver, and copper while enslaving the indigenous peoples and converting them to Christianity. Spain never encouraged vast numbers of settlers to populate New Spain, and, with few exceptions, those who did travel to the New World rarely wanted to make a living off the land; they instead wanted to live off the labor of the native population.

For three centuries after Columbus arrived in the New World, the Spanish explorers, conquistadores, and priests imposed Catholicism on the native peoples as well as a cruel system of economic exploitation and dependence. That system created terrible disparities in wealth, education, and opportunity that would trigger repeated revolts and political instability. As Bartolomé de Las Casas concluded, “The Spaniards have shown not the slightest consideration for these people, treating them (and I speak from first-hand experience, having been there from the outset) . . . as piles of dung in the middle of the road. They have had as little concern for their souls as for their bodies.”