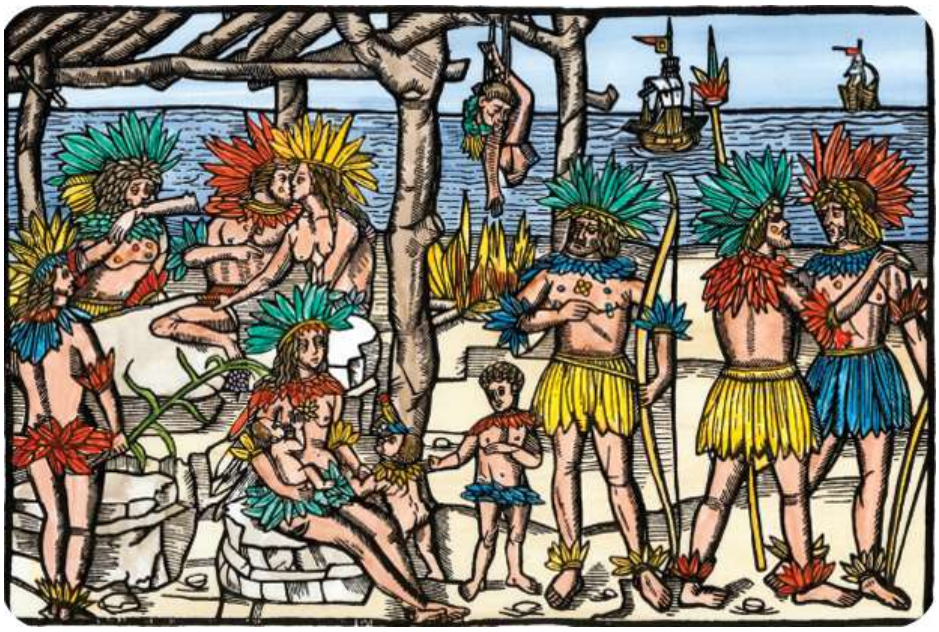
1 THE COLLISION OF CULTURES



FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH NATIVE AMERICANS **This 1505 engraving is one of the earliest European images of the way Native Americans lived in the early Americas. It also represents some of the ways in which white Europeans would view the people they called Indians for many generations. Native Americans here were portrayed by Europeans as exotic savages, whose sexuality was not contained within stable families and whose savagery was evidenced in their practice of eating the flesh of their slain enemies. In the background are the ships that have brought the European visitors who recorded these images.**

LOOKING AHEAD

1. How did the societies of native peoples in South America differ from those in North America in the precontact period (before the arrival of the Europeans)?
2. What effects did the arrival of Europeans have on the native peoples of the Americas?
3. How did patterns of settlement differ among the Spanish, English, French, and Dutch immigrants to the Americas?

SETTING THE STAGE

THE DISCOVERY OF THE AMERICAS **did not begin with Christopher Columbus in 1492. It began many thousands of years earlier when human beings first crossed into the American continents and began to people them. By the end of the fifteenth century CE, when the first important contact with Europeans occurred, the Americas were the home of millions of men and women.**

These ancient civilizations experienced many changes and many catastrophes during their long history. But none of these experiences was likely as tragically transforming as the arrival of Europeans. In the short term–in the first violent years of Spanish and Portuguese exploration and conquest–the impact of the new arrivals was profound. Europeans brought with them diseases (most notably smallpox) to which natives, unlike the invaders, had no immunity. The result was a great demographic catastrophe that killed millions of people, weakened existing societies, and greatly aided the Spanish and Portuguese in their rapid and devastating conquest of the existing American empires. Although in the long term European settlers came to dominate most areas of the Americas, the Europeans were never able to eliminate the influence of the existing peoples (whom they came to call "Indians"). Battles between natives and Europeans continued into the late nineteenth century and beyond. But there were also productive interactions through which these very different civilizations shaped one another. They learned from one another and changed each other permanently and profoundly.

I. AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS

We still know relatively little about the first peoples in the Americas. What we do know comes from scattered archaeological discoveries–new evidence from artifacts that have survived over many millennia.

A. THE PEOPLES OF THE PRECONTACT AMERICAS

THE "CLOVIS" PEOPLE

For many decades, scholars believed that all early migrations into the Americas came from humans crossing an ancient land bridge over the Bering Strait into what is now Alaska, approximately 11,000 years ago. These migrants then traveled from the glacial north, through an unfrozen corridor between two great ice sheets, until they reached the nonglacial lands to the south. The migrations were probably a result of the development of new stone tools–spears and other hunting implements–with which migrating people could pursue the large animals that regularly crossed between Asia and North America. All of these land-based migrants are thought to have come from a Mongolian stock related to that of modern-day Siberia. They are known to scholars as the "Clovis" people, named for a town in New Mexico.

The Clovis people established one of the first civilizations in the Americas. Archaeologists believe that they lived about 13,000 years ago. They were among the first people to make tools and to eat other animals. The Clovis are believed to have migrated from Siberia across the Bering land bridge into Alaska. From there, they moved southward to warmer regions, including New Mexico.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND POPULATION DIVERSITY

More recent archaeological evidence, however, suggests that not all the early migrants came across the Bering Strait. Some migrants from Asia appear to have settled as far south as Chile and Peru even before people began moving into North America by land. This suggests that these first South Americans may have come not by land but by sea, using boats. Other discoveries on other continents made clear that migrants had traveled by water much earlier to populate Japan, Australia, and other areas of the Pacific. Those discoveries suggest that migrants were capable of making long ocean voyages–long enough to bring them to the American coasts.

This new evidence suggests that the early population of the Americas was much more diverse and more scattered than scholars used to believe. Some people came to the Americas from farther south in Asia than Mongolia–perhaps Polynesia and Japan. Recent DNA evidence has identified what may have been yet another population group that, unlike most other American groups, does not seem to have Asian characteristics. Thus it is also possible that, thousands of years before Columbus, there may have been some migration from Europe or Africa. Most Indians in the Americas today share relatively similar characteristics, and those characteristics link them to modern Siberians and Mongolians. But that does not prove that Mongolian migrants were the only immigrants to the Americas. It suggests, rather, that Mongolian migrants eventually came to dominate and perhaps eliminate earlier population groups.

THE "ARCHAIC" PERIOD

The "Archaic" period is a scholarly term for the history of humans in America during a period of about 5,000 years beginning around 8000 BCE. In the first part of this period, most humans continued to support themselves through hunting and gathering, using the same stone tools that earlier Americans had brought with them from Asia. Some of the largest animals that the earliest humans in America once hunted became extinct during the Archaic period. But archaic people continued to hunt with spears in the area later known as the Great Plains of North America who, then as centuries later, pursued bison (also known as buffalo). Bows and arrows were unknown in most of North America until 400–500 CE.

Later in the Archaic period, population groups also began to develop new tools to perform work. Among them were nets and hooks for fishing, traps for smaller animals, and baskets for gathering berries, nuts, seeds, and other plants. Later, some groups began to farm. Through much of the Americas, the most important farm crop was corn, but many agricultural communities also grew other crops such as beans and squash. In agricultural areas, the first sedentary settlements slowly began to form, creating the basis for larger civilizations.

B. THE GROWTH OF CIVILIZATIONS: THE SOUTH

The most elaborate early civilizations emerged south of what is now the United States–in South and Central America and in what is now Mexico. In Peru, the Incas created the largest empire in the Americas. They began as a small tribe in the mountainous region of Cuzco, in the early fifteenth century–spurred by a powerful leader, Pachacuti (whose name meant "world shaker"). His empire stretched along almost 2,000 miles of western South America. It was an empire created as much by persuasion as by force. Pachacuti's agents fanned out around the region and explained the benefits of the empire to people in the areas the Incas hoped to control. Most local leaders eventually allied themselves with the Incas. The empire was sustained by innovative administrative systems and by the creation of a large network of paved roads.

Another great civilization emerged from the so-called Meso-Americans, the peoples of what is now Mexico and much of Central America. Organized societies emerged in these regions as early as 10,000 BCE, and the first truly complex society in the Americas–of the Olmec people–began in approximately 1000 BCE. A more sophisticated culture emerged beginning around 800 CE in parts of Central America and in the Yucatán peninsula of Mexico, in an area

known as Maya. Mayan civilization developed a written language, a numerical system similar to the Arabic, an accurate calendar, an advanced agricultural system, and important trade routes into other areas of the continents. Gradually, the societies of the Mayan regions were followed by other Meso-American tribes. They became known collectively (and somewhat inaccurately) as the Aztec. They called themselves Mexica, a name that eventually came to describe people of a number of different tribes. In about 1300 CE, the Mexica established a city, which they named Tenochtitlán, on a large island in a lake in central Mexico, the site of present-day Mexico City. The Mexica soon incorporated the peoples of other tribes into their society as well. It became by far the greatest city ever created in the Americas to that point, with a population as high as 100,000 by 1500, connected to water supplies from across the region by aqueducts. The residents of Tenochtitlán also created large and impressive public buildings, schools that all male children attended, an organized military, a medical system, and a slave workforce drawn from conquered tribes. They gradually established their dominance over almost all of central Mexico, and beyond, through a system of tribute (a heavy tax paid in crops, cloth, or animals) enforced by military power. The peoples ruled by the Mexica maintained a significant element of independence nevertheless, and many of them always considered the Mexica to be tyrannical rulers, but too powerful to resist.

Like other Meso-American societies, the Mexica developed a religion based on a belief in human sacrifice. Unlike earlier societies in the Americas, whose sacrifices to the gods emphasized blood-letting and other mostly nonfatal techniques, the Mexica also believed that the gods could be satisfied by being fed the living hearts of humans. But the Mexica also believed that the gods could be satisfied only by being fed the living hearts of humans. As a result, they sacrificed people–largely prisoners captured in combat–on a scale unknown in other American civilizations.

The Meso-American civilizations were for many centuries the center of civilized life in North and Central America–the hub of culture and trade. Disease and disunity made it difficult for them to survive the European invasions. But they were, nevertheless, very great civilizations–all the more impressive because they lacked some of the crucial technologies that Asian and European societies had long employed. As late as the sixteenth century CE, no American society had yet developed wheeled vehicles.

C. THE CIVILIZATIONS OF THE NORTH

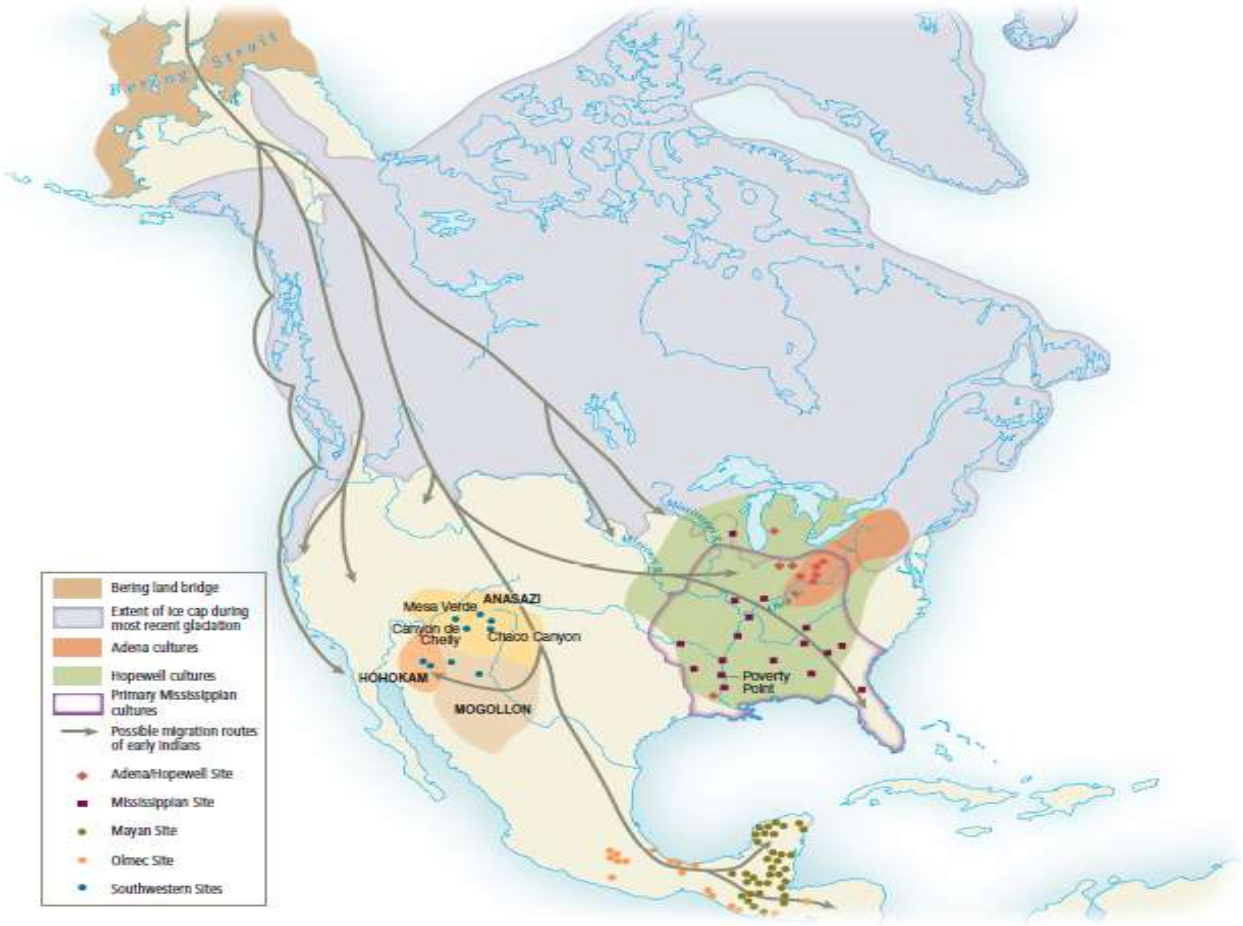
COMPLEX AND VARIED CIVILIZATIONS

The peoples north of Mexico–in the lands that became the United States and Canada–did not develop empires as large or political systems as elaborate as those of the Incas, Mayas, and Mexica. They built complex civilizations of great variety that subsisted on hunting, gathering, and fishing. The Eskimos of the Arctic Circle fished and hunted seals; their civilization spanned thousands of miles of largely frozen land, which they traversed by dogsled. The big-game hunters of the northern forests led nomadic lives based on pursuit of moose and caribou. The tribes of the Pacific Northwest, whose principal occupation was salmon fishing, created substantial permanent settlements along the coast and engaged in constant and often violent competition with one another for access to natural resources.

Another group of tribes spread through more arid regions of the Far West and developed successful communities–many of them quite wealthy and densely populated–based on fishing, hunting small game, and gathering. Other societies in America were primarily agricultural. Among the most elaborate were those in the Southwest. The people of that region built large irrigation systems to allow farming on their relatively dry land. They constructed substantial towns that became centers of trade, crafts, and religious and civic ritual. Their densely populated settlements at Chaco Canyon and elsewhere consisted of stone and adobe terraced structures, known today as pueblos, many of which resembled the large apartment buildings of later eras in size and design. In the Great Plains region, too, most tribes were engaged in sedentary farming (corn and other grains) and lived in permanent settlements, although there were some small nomadic tribes that subsisted by hunting buffalo. (Only in the eighteenth century, after Europeans had introduced the horse to North America, did buffalo hunting begin to support a large population in the region; at that point, many once-sedentary farmers left the land to pursue the great migratory buffalo herds.)

The eastern third of what is now the United States–much of it covered with forests and inhabited by people who have thus become known as the Woodland Indians–had the greatest food resources of any region of the continent. Many tribes lived there, and most of them engaged in farming, hunting, gathering, and fishing. In the South there were substantial permanent settlements and large trading networks based on corn and other grains grown in the rich lands of the Mississippi River valley. Among the major cities that emerged as a result of trade was Cahokia (near present-day St. Louis), which at its peak in 1200 CE had a population of about 10,000 and contained a great complex of large earthen mounds.

The agricultural societies of the Northeast were more nomadic than those in other regions. Much of the land in the region was less fertile than other regions because farming was newer and less established. Most tribes combined farming with hunting. Farming techniques in the Northeast were usually designed to exploit the land quickly rather than to develop permanent settlements. Natives often cleared the land by setting forest fires or cutting into trees to kill them. They then planted crops–corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and others–among the dead or blackened trunks. After a few years, when the land became exhausted or the filth from a settlement began to accumulate, they moved on and established themselves elsewhere. In some parts of eastern North America, villages dispersed every winter and families foraged in the wilderness until warm weather returned; those who survived then reassembled to begin farming again.



NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATIONS: **This map tracks some of the early migrations into, and within, North America in the centuries preceding contact with Europe. The map shows the now-vanished land bridge between Siberia and Alaska over which thousands, perhaps millions, of migrating people passed into the Americas. It also shows the locations of some of the earliest settlements in North America.**

- ***What role did the extended glacial field in what is now Canada have on residential patterns in the ancient American world?***

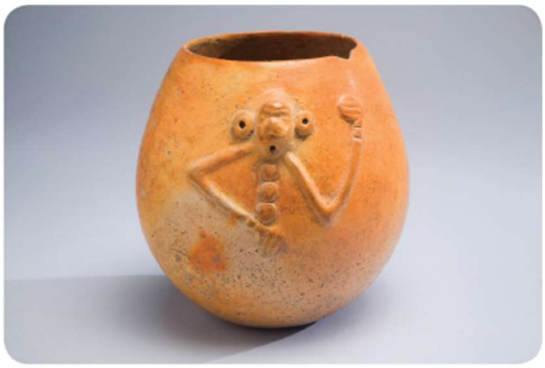
MAYAN TEMPLE, TIKAL: **Tikal was the largest city in what was then the vast Mayan Empire. It extended through what is now Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. The temple shown here was built before 800 CE and was one of many pyramids created by the Mayas. Only a few of these pyramids still survive.**
(© M.L. Sinibaldi/Corbis)

HOW THE EARLY NORTH AMERICANS LIVED: This map shows the various ways in which the native tribes of North America supported themselves before the arrival of European civilization. Like most precommercial peoples, the native Americans survived largely on the resources available in their immediate surroundings. Note, for example, the reliance on the products of the sea of the tribes along the northern coastlines of the continent, and the way in which tribes in relatively inhospitable climates in the North–where agriculture was difficult–relied on hunting large game. Most native Americans were farmers.

- ***What different kinds of farming would have emerged in the very different climates of the agricultural regions shown on this map?***

MOBILE SOCIETIES

Many of the tribes living east of the Mississippi River were linked together loosely by common linguistic roots. The largest of the language groups was the Algonquian, which dominated the Atlantic seaboard from Canada to Virginia. Another important language group was the Iroquoian, centered in what is now upstate New York. The Iroquois included at least five distinct northern “nations”–the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk–and had links as well with the Cherokees and the Tuscaroras farther south, in the Carolinas and Georgia. The third-largest language group–the Muskogean–included the tribes in the southernmost region of the eastern seaboard: the Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles. Alliances among the various Indian societies (even among those with common languages) were fragile, since the peoples of the Americas did not think of themselves as members of a single civilization.



MAYAN MONKEY-MAN SCRIBAL GOD: The Mayas believed in hundreds of different gods, and they attempted to personify many of them in various artifacts such as the one depicted on the bowl shown here, which dates from 900–1100 CE. The monkey gods were believed to be twins who took the form of monkeys after being lured into a tree from which they could not descend. According to legend, they abandoned their loincloths, which then became tails, which they then used to move more effectively up and down trees. The monkey-men were the patrons of writing, dancing, and art.
(© Collection of the Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Gift of the Institute of Maya Studies/The Bridgeman Art Library)

CAHOKIA: An artist's rendition of the city of Cahokia circa 1100 CE. Its great earthen mounds, constructed by the Cahokia Indians near present-day St. Louis, have endured into modern times as part of the Missouri landscape.
(Courtesy of Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Collinsville, Illinois. Painting by William R. Iseminger)

D. TRIBAL CULTURES

AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION

The enormous diversity of economic, social, and political structures among the North American Indians makes large generalizations about their cultures difficult. In the last centuries before the arrival of Europeans, however, Native Americans–like peoples in other areas of the world–were experiencing an agricultural revolution. In all regions of the United States, tribes were becoming more sedentary and were developing new sources of food, clothing, and shelter. Most regions were experiencing significant population growth. Virtually all were developing the sorts of elaborate social customs and rituals that only stationary societies can produce. Religion was as important to Indian society as it was to most other cultures, and it was usually closely bound up with the natural world on which the tribes depended. Native Americans worshiped many gods, whom they associated with crops, game, forests, rivers, and other elements of nature. Some tribes created elaborate, brightly colored totems as part of their religious ritual; most staged large festivals on such important occasions as harvests or major hunts.

As in other parts of the world, the societies of North America tended to divide tasks according to gender. All tribes assigned women the jobs of caring for children, preparing meals, and gathering certain foods. But the allocation of other tasks varied from one society to another. Some tribal groups (notably the Pueblos of the Southwest) reserved farming tasks almost entirely for men. Among others (including the Algonquins, the Iroquois, and the Muskogees), women tended the fields, while men engaged in hunting, warfare, or clearing land. Iroquois women and children were often left alone for extended periods while men were away hunting or fighting battles. As a result, women tended to control the social and economic organization of the settlements and played powerful roles within families.

II. EUROPE LOOKS WESTWARD

Europeans were almost entirely unaware of the existence of the Americas before the fifteenth century. A few early wanderers–Leif Eriksson, an eleventh-century Norse seaman, and perhaps others–had glimpsed parts of the New World and had demonstrated that Europeans were capable of crossing the ocean to reach it. But even if their discoveries had become common knowledge (and they had not), there would have been little incentive for others to follow. Europe in the Middle Ages (roughly 500–1500 CE) was not an adventurous civilization. Divided into innumerable small duchies and kingdoms, Europe had an overwhelmingly provincial outlook. Subsistence agriculture predominated, and commerce was limited; few merchants looked beyond the boundaries of their own regions. The Roman Catholic Church exercised a measure of spiritual authority over most of the continent, and the Holy Roman Empire provided at least a nominal political center. Even so, real power was widely dispersed; only rarely could a single leader launch a great venture. Gradually, however, conditions in Europe changed so that by the late fifteenth century, interest in overseas exploration had grown.

A. COMMERCE AND NATIONALISM

A REAWAKENING OF COMMERCE

Two important and related changes provided the first incentive for Europeans to look toward new lands. One was a result of the significant population growth in fifteenth-century Europe. The Black Death, a catastrophic epidemic of the bubonic plague that began in Constantinople in 1347, had decimated Europe, killing (according to some estimates) more than a third of the people of the continent and debilitating its already-limited economy. But a century and a half later, the population had rebounded. With that growth came a rise in land values, a reawakening of commerce, and a general increase in prosperity. Affluent landlords became eager to purchase goods from distant regions, and a new merchant class emerged to meet their demand. As trade increased, and as advances in navigation and shipbuilding made long-distance sea travel more feasible, interest in developing new markets, finding new products, and opening new trade routes rapidly increased.

CENTRALIZED NATION-STATES

Paralleling the rise of commerce in Europe, and in part responsible for it, was the rise of new governments that were more united and powerful than the feeble political entities of the feudal past. In the western areas of Europe, the authority of the distant pope and the even more distant Holy Roman Emperor was necessarily weak. As a result, strong new monarchs emerged and created centralized nation-states, with national courts, national armies, and–perhaps most important–national tax systems. As these ambitious kings and queens consolidated their power and increased their wealth, they became eager to enhance the commercial growth of their nations.

Ever since the early fourteenth century, when Marco Polo and other adventurers had returned from Asia bearing exotic goods (spices, fabrics, dyes) and exotic tales, Europeans who hoped for commercial glory had dreamed of trade with the East. For two centuries, that trade had been limited by the difficulties of the long, arduous overland journey to the Asian courts. But in the fourteenth century, as the maritime capabilities of several western European societies increased and as Muslim societies seized control of the eastern routes to Asia, there began to be serious talk of finding a faster, safer sea route to Asia. Such dreams found a receptive audience in the courts of the new monarchs. By the late fifteenth century, some of them were ready to finance daring voyages of exploration.

PRINCE HENRY THE NAVIGATOR

The first to do so were the Portuguese. They were the preeminent maritime power in the fifteenth century, in large part because of the work of one man, Prince Henry the Navigator. Henry's own principal interest was not in finding a sea route to Asia, but in exploring the western coast of Africa. He dreamed of establishing a Christian empire there to aid in his country's wars against the Moors of northern Africa; and he hoped to find new stores of gold. The explorations he began did not fulfill his own hopes, but they ultimately led farther than he had dreamed. Some of Henry's mariners went as far south as Cape Verde, on Africa's west coast. In 1486 (six years after Henry's death), Bartholomeu Dias rounded the southern tip of Africa (the Cape of Good Hope); and in 1497–1498 Vasco da Gama proceeded all the way around the cape to India. In 1500, the next fleet bound for India, under the command of Pedro Cabral, was blown westward off its southerly course and happened upon the coast of Brazil. But by then another man, in the service of another country, had already encountered the New World.

B. CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Christopher Columbus, who was born and reared in Genoa, Italy, obtained most of his early seafaring experience in the service of the Portuguese. As a young man, he became intrigued with the possibility, already under discussion in many seafaring circles, of reaching Asia by going not east but west. Columbus's hopes rested on several basic misconceptions. He believed that the world was far smaller than it actually is. He also believed that the Asian continent extended farther eastward than it actually does. He assumed, therefore, that the Atlantic was narrow enough to be crossed on a relatively brief voyage. It did not occur to him that anything lay to the west between Europe and Asia.

Columbus failed to win support for his plan in Portugal, so he turned to Spain. The Spaniards were not yet as advanced a maritime people as the Portuguese, but they were at least as energetic and ambitious. And in the

fifteenth century, the marriage of Spain's two most powerful regional rulers, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, had produced the strongest monarchy in Europe. Like other young monarchies, Spain soon grew eager to demonstrate its strength by sponsoring new commercial ventures.

COLUMBUS'S FIRST VOYAGE

Columbus appealed to Queen Isabella for support for his proposed westward voyage. In 1492, Isabella agreed to Columbus's request. Commanding ninety men and three ships–the *Niña,* the *Pinta,* and the *Santa María*–Columbus left Spain in August 1492 and sailed west into the Atlantic on what he thought was a straight course for Japan. Ten weeks later, he sighted land and assumed he had reached his target. In fact, he had landed on an island in the Bahamas. When he pushed on and encountered Cuba, he assumed he had reached China. He returned to Spain in triumph, bringing with him several captured natives as evidence of his achievement. (He called the natives “Indians” because he believed they were from the East Indies in the Pacific.)

But Columbus had not, of course, encountered the court of the great khan in China or the fabled wealth of the Indies. A year later, therefore, he tried again, this time with a much larger expedition. As before, he headed into the Caribbean, discovering several other islands and leaving a small and short-lived colony on Hispaniola. On a third voyage, in 1498, he finally reached the mainland and cruised along the northern coast of South America. When he passed the mouth of the Orinoco River (in present-day Venezuela), he concluded for the first time that what he had discovered was not an island off the coast of China, as he had assumed, but a separate continent; such a large freshwater stream, he realized, could emerge only from a large body of land. Still, he remained convinced that Asia was only a short distance away. And although he failed in his efforts to sail around the northeastern coast of South America to the Indies (he was blocked by the Isthmus of Panama), he returned to Spain believing that he had explored at least the fringes of the Far East. He continued to believe that for the rest of his life.
Columbus's celebrated accomplishments made him a popular hero for a time, but he later died in obscurity. When Europeans at last gave a name to the New World, they ignored him. The distinction went instead to a Florentine merchant, Amerigo Vespucci, a member of a later Portuguese expedition to the New World who wrote a series of vivid descriptions of the lands he had visited and who recognized the Americas as new continents.

RELIGIOUS MOTIVES FOR EXPLORATION

Columbus has been celebrated for centuries as the “Admiral of the Ocean Sea” and as a representative of the new, secular, scientific impulses of Renaissance Europe. But Columbus was also a deeply religious man, even something of a mystic. His voyages were inspired as much by his conviction that he was fulfilling a divine mission as by his interest in geography and trade. A strong believer in biblical prophecies, he came to see himself as a man destined to advance the coming of the millennium. “God made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth,” Columbus wrote near the end of his life, “and he showed me the spot where to find it.” A similar combination of worldly and religious passions lay behind many subsequent efforts at exploration and settlement of the New World.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: This oil painting by Frederick Kemmelmeyer (1801/1805), *First Landing of Christopher Columbus,* depicts Columbus and his crew in a somewhat idealized fashion. The artist's perspective shows the Europeans as larger and more powerful than the Native population they encounter. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

THE INDIAN VILLAGE OF SECOTON (C. 1585), BY JOHN WHITE
John White created this illustration of life among the Eastern Woodland Indians in coastal North Carolina. It shows the diversified agriculture practiced by the natives: squash, tobacco, and three varieties of corn. The hunters shown in nearby woods suggest another element of the native economy. At bottom right, Indians perform a religious ritual, which White described as "strange gestures and songs."

FERDINAND MAGELLAN

Partly as a result of Columbus's initiative, Spain began to devote greater resources and energy to maritime exploration and gradually replaced Portugal as the leading seafaring nation. The Spaniard Vasco de Balboa fought his way across the Isthmus of Panama in 1513. He became the first known European to gaze westward upon the great ocean that separated the Americas from China and the Indies. Seeking access to that ocean, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese in the employ of the Spanish, found the strait that now bears his name at the southern end of South America. He struggled through the stormy narrows and into the ocean (so calm by contrast that he christened it the "Pacific"), then proceeded to the Philippines. There Magellan died in a conflict with the natives, but his expedition went on to complete the first known circumnavigation of the globe (1519–1522). By 1550, Spaniards had explored the coasts of North America as far north as Oregon in the west and Labrador in the east, as well as some of the interior regions of the continent.

C. THE CONQUISTADORES

In time, Spanish explorers in the New World stopped thinking of America simply as an obstacle to their search for a route to the East. They began instead to consider it a possible source of wealth rivaling and even surpassing the original Indies. On the basis of Columbus's discoveries, the Spanish claimed for themselves the whole of the New World, except for a piece of it (today's Brazil) that was reserved by a papal decree for the Portuguese. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Spanish were well on their way to establishing a substantial American empire.

CORTÉS CONQUERS THE AZTECS

The first Spanish colonists, whom Columbus brought on his second voyage, settled on the islands of the Caribbean, where they tried to enslave the Indians and find gold. They had little luck in either effort. But then, in 1518, Hernando Cortés led a small military expedition of about 600 men into Mexico. Cortés had been a Spanish government official in Cuba for fourteen years and to that point had achieved little success. But when he heard stories of great treasures in Mexico, he decided to go in search of them. He met strong and resourceful resistance from the Aztecs and their powerful emperor, Montezuma. But Cortés and his army had, unknowingly, unleashed an assault on the Aztecs far more devastating than military attack: they had exposed the natives to smallpox during an early and relatively

peaceful visit to Tenochtitlán. A smallpox epidemic decimated the population and made it possible for the Spanish to triumph in their second attempt at conquest. The Spanish believed that the epidemic was a vindication of their efforts. When the Christians were exhausted from war, one follower of Cortés said at the time, "God saw fit to send the Indians smallpox." Through his ruthless suppression of the surviving natives, Cortés established a lasting reputation as the most brutal of the Spanish *conquistadores* (conquerors).

EUROPEAN EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST, 1492–1583

This map shows the many voyages of exploration and conquest of North America launched by Europeans in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Note how Columbus and the Spanish explorers who followed him tended to move quickly into the lands of Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, while the English and French explored the northern territories of North America.

- ***What factors might have led these various nations to explore and colonize these different areas of the New World?***

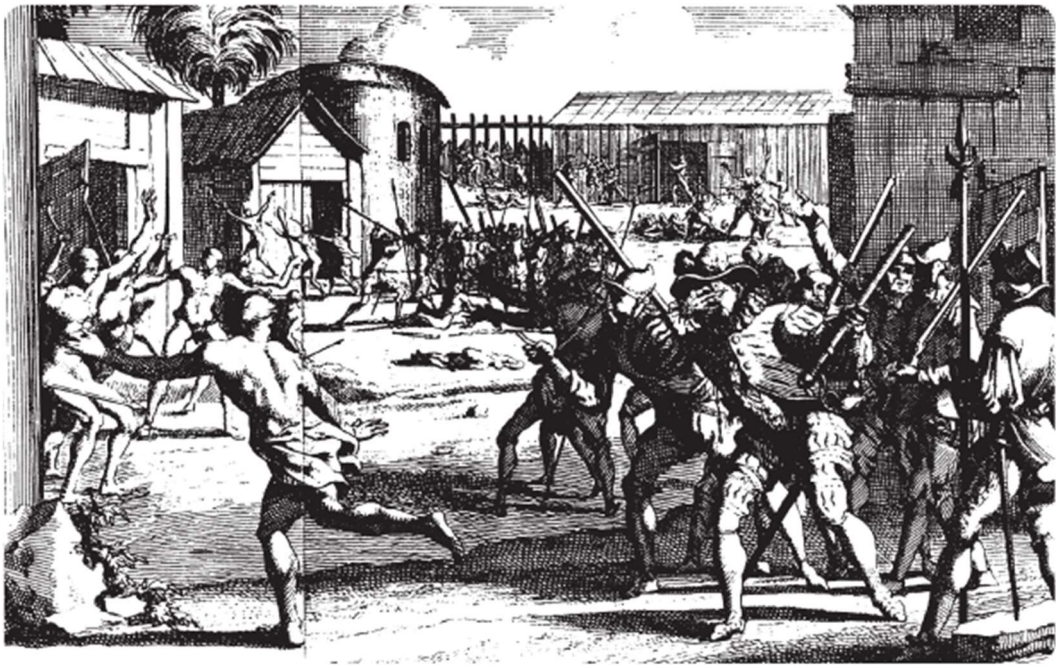
THE MEXICANS STRIKE BACK: In this vivid scene from the Duran Codex, Mexican artists illustrate a rare moment in which Mexican warriors gained the upper hand over the Spanish invaders. Driven back by native fighters, the Spanish have taken refuge in a room in the royal palace in Tenochtitlán while brightly attired Mexican warriors besiege them. Although the Mexicans gained a temporary advantage in this battle, the drawing illustrates one of the reasons for their inability to withstand the Spanish in the longer term. The Spanish soldiers are armed with rifles and crossbows, while the Indians carry only spears and shields.
(© Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Spain/The Bridgeman Art Library)

PIZARRO IN PERU: A European artist depicted Pizarro's arrival on the coast of Peru in the early 1530s, where he was greeted by crowds of hostile Indians. By 1538, Pizarro had conquered the empire of the Incas.
(Library of Congress)

The news that silver was to be found in Mexico attracted the attention of other Spaniards. From the island colonies and from Spain itself, a wave of conquistadores descended on the mainland in search of fortune. Francisco Pizarro, who conquered Peru (1532–1538) and revealed to Europeans the wealth of the Incas, opened the way for other advances into South America. His onetime deputy Hernando de Soto, in a futile search for gold, silver, and jewels, led several expeditions (1539–1541) through Florida west into the continent and became the first white man known to have crossed the Mississippi River. Francisco Coronado traveled north from Mexico (1540–1542) into what is now New Mexico in a similarly fruitless search for gold and jewels; in the process, he helped open the Southwest of what is now the United States to Spanish settlement.

BRUTALITY AND GREED

The story of the Spanish warriors is one of great military daring and achievement. It is also a story of great brutality and greed–a story that would be repeated time and again over centuries of European conquest of the Americas. The conquistadores in some areas almost exterminated the native populations through a combination of warfare and disease.



DE SOTO IN NORTH AMERICA: This gruesome drawing portrays Spanish troops under Hernando de Soto massacring a group of Mobile Indians in what is now Alabama, in the winter of 1540–1541. De Soto had been governor of Cuba, but in 1539 he sailed to Florida with 600 troops and for the next several years traveled through large areas of what would later become the southern United States until he died of fever in 1542. Here, as elsewhere, his troops dealt with the Indian tribes they encountered along the way with unrestrained brutality.
(Rare Books and Special Collections, Library of Congress)

D. SPANISH AMERICA

ORDINANCES OF DISCOVERY

Lured by dreams of treasure, Spanish explorers, conquistadores, and colonists established a vast empire for Spain in the New World. The history of the Spanish Empire spanned three distinct periods. The first was the age of discovery and exploration–beginning with Columbus and continuing through the first two decades of the sixteenth century. The second was the age of the conquest, in which Spanish military forces (aided by the diseases they unleashed) established their dominion over the lands once ruled by natives. The third phase began in the 1570s, when new Spanish laws–the Ordinances of Discovery–banned the most brutal military conquests. From that point on, the Spanish expanded their presence in America through colonization.

The first Spaniards to arrive in the New World, the conquistadores, had been interested in only one thing: getting rich. And in that they were fabulously successful. For 300 years, beginning in the sixteenth century, the mines in Spanish America yielded more than ten times as much gold and silver as the rest of the world's mines put together. These riches made Spain the wealthiest and most powerful nation for a time.

After the first wave of conquest, however, most Spanish settlers in America traveled to the New World for other reasons. Many went in hopes of creating a profitable agricultural economy. Unlike the conquistadores, who left little but destruction behind them, these settlers helped establish elements of European civilization in America that permanently altered both the landscape and the social structure.

CATHOLIC MISSIONS

Another important force for colonization was the Catholic Church. Ferdinand and Isabella, in establishing Spain's claim to most of the Americas from Mexico south, bowed to the wishes of the Church and established the requirement that Catholicism be the only religion of the new territories. Spain abided by that condition. Although the Spanish founded commercial and military centers in the sixteenth century, another common form of settlement by the early seventeenth century was the Catholic mission. Missions had commercial lives. But their primary purpose, at least at first, was converting natives to Catholicism. There were usually military garrisons connected to the missions, to protect the Europeans from hostile natives. *Presidios* (military bases) often grew up nearby to provide additional protection. Indeed, after the era of the conquistadores came to a close in the 1540s, the missionary impulse became one of the most important motives for European emigration to America. Priests or friars accompanied almost all colonizing ventures. Through their zealous work, the gospel of the Catholic Church ultimately extended throughout South and Central America, Mexico, and into the South and Southwest of the present United States.

SPANISH AMERICA

From the time of Columbus's initial voyage in 1492 until the mid-nineteenth century, Spain was the dominant colonial power in the New World. From the southern regions of South America to the northern regions of the Pacific Northwest, Spain controlled one of the world's largest empires. Note how much of the Spanish Empire was simply grafted upon the earlier empires of native peoples–the Incas in what is today Chile and Peru, and the Aztecs across much of the rest of South America, Mexico, and the Southwest of what is now the United States.

- ***What characteristics of Spanish colonization would account for Spain's preference for already-settled regions?***

E. Northern Outposts

St. Augustine

The Spanish fort established in 1565 at St. Augustine, Florida, became the first permanent European settlement in what is now the United States. It served as a military outpost, an administrative center for Franciscan missionaries, and a headquarters for unsuccessful campaigns against North American natives that were ultimately abandoned. But it did not mark the beginning of a substantial effort at colonization in the region.A more substantial colonizing venture began thirty years later in the Southwest. In 1598, Don Juan de Oñate traveled north from Mexico with a party of 500 men. He claimed for Spain some of the lands of the Pueblo Indians that Coronado had passed through over fifty years before. The Spanish migrants established a colony in what is now New Mexico, modeled roughly on those the Spanish had created farther south. Oñate distributed *encomiendas* to the Spanish settlers. They were licenses to exact labor and tribute from the natives in specific areas (a system first used in dealing with the Moors in Spain). The Spanish demanded tribute from the local Indians (and at times commandeered them as laborers). Spanish colonists founded Santa Fe in 1609.Oñate's harsh treatment of the natives (who greatly outnumbered the small Spanish population) threatened the stability of the new colony and led to his removal as governor in 1606. Over time, relations between the Spanish and the Pueblos improved. Substantial numbers of Pueblos converted to Christianity under the influence of Spanish missionaries. Others entered into important trading relationships with the Spanish. The colony remained precarious nevertheless because of the danger from Apache and Navajo raiders, who threatened the Spanish and Pueblos alike. Even so, the New Mexico settlement continued to grow. By 1680, there were over 2,000 Spanish colonists living among about 30,000 Pueblos. The economic heart of the colony was not the gold and precious metals the early Spanish explorers had tried in vain to find. It was cattle and sheep, raised on the *ranchos* that stretched out around the small towns Spanish settlers established.

Pueblo Revolt of 1680

In 1680, the colony was nearly destroyed when the Pueblos rose in revolt. In the 1660s and 1670s, the Spanish priests and the colonial government, which was closely tied to the missionaries, launched efforts to suppress tribal rituals that Europeans considered incompatible with Christianity. The discontent among the natives at this suppression survived for decades. More important as a cause of the Pueblo revolt of 1680, however, was a major drought and a series of raids by neighboring Apache tribes. The instability these events produced sparked the uprising. An Indian religious leader named Pope led an uprising that killed hundreds of European settlers (including twenty-one priests), captured Santa Fe, and drove the Spanish temporarily from the region. But twelve years later the Spanish returned, resumed seizing Pueblo lands, and crushed a last revolt in 1696.Spanish exploitation of the Pueblos did not end. But after the revolts, many Spanish colonists realized that they could not prosper in New Mexico if they remained constantly in conflict with a native population that greatly outnumbered them. They tried to solve the problem in two ways. On the one hand, the Spanish intensified their efforts to assimilate the Indians–baptizing Indian children at birth and enforcing observance of Catholic rituals. On the other hand, they now permitted the Pueblos to own land. They stopped commandeering Indian labor, they replaced the encomienda system with a less demanding and oppressive one, and they tacitly tolerated the practice of tribal religious rituals. These efforts were at least partially successful. After a while, there was significant intermarriage between Europeans and Indians. Increasingly, the Pueblos came to consider the Spanish their allies in the continuing battles with the Apaches and Navajos. By 1750, the Spanish population had grown modestly to about 4,000. The Pueblo population had declined (through disease, war, and migration) to about 13,000, less than half what it had been in 1680. New Mexico had by then become a reasonably stable, but still weak and isolated, outpost of the Spanish Empire.

F. The Empire at High Tide

Spain's Vast Empire

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish Empire had become one of the largest in the history of the world. It included the islands of the Caribbean and the coastal areas of South America that had been the first targets of the Spanish expeditions. It extended to Mexico and southern North America, where a second wave of colonizers had established outposts. Most of all, the empire spread southward and westward into the vast landmass of South America–the areas that are now Chile, Argentina, and Peru. In 1580, when the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies temporarily united, Brazil came under Spanish jurisdiction as well.

Rigid Royal Control

It was, however, a colonial empire very different from the one the English would establish in North America beginning in the early seventeenth century. The earliest Spanish ventures in the New World had been largely independent of the throne. But by the end of the sixteenth century, the monarchy had extended its authority directly into the governance of local communities. Colonists had few opportunities to establish political institutions independent of Spain. There was also a significant economic difference between the Spanish Empire and the later British one. The Spanish were far more successful than the British would be in extracting great surface wealth–gold and silver–from their American colonies. But they concentrated less energy on making agriculture and commerce profitable in their colonies. The strict commercial policies of the Spanish government (policies that the British Empire was never strong enough to impose on their colonies to the north) made things worse. To enforce the collection of duties and to provide protection against pirates, the government established rigid and restrictive regulations that required all trade with the colonies to go through a single Spanish port and only a few colonial ports, in fleets making but two voyages a year. The system stifled economic development of the Spanish areas of the New World.

GOLD IN THE AMERICAS: Spanish conquistadors and settlers were wildly successful in their acquisition of gold in the Americas. For three hundred years, beginning in the sixteenth century, mines in America produced more than ten times as much gold and silver as the rest of the world's production put together. This image shows how the Spaniards enslaved Natives to do the hard work of mining gold.
(© North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy)

A COLLISION OF CULTURES

There was also an important difference between the character of the population in the Spanish Empire and that of the colonies to the north. Almost from the beginning, the English, Dutch, and French colonies in North America concentrated on establishing permanent settlement and family life in the New World. The Europeans in North America reproduced rapidly after their first difficult years and in time came to outnumber the natives. The Spanish, by contrast, ruled their empire but did not people it. In the first century of settlement, fewer than 250,000 settlers in the Spanish colonies were from Spain itself or from any other European country. Only about 200,000 more arrived in the first half of the seventeenth century. Some additional settlers came from various outposts of Spanish civilization in the Atlantic–the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands, and elsewhere; but even with these other sources, the number of European settlers in Spanish America remained very small relative to the native population. Despite the ravages of disease and war, the vast majority of the population of the Spanish Empire continued to consist of natives. The Spanish, in other words, imposed a small ruling class upon a much larger existing population; they did not create a self-contained European society in the New World as the English would attempt to do in North America.

G. BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES

The lines separating the races in the Spanish Empire gradually grew less distinct than they would be in the English colonies to the north. European and native cultures never entirely merged in the Spanish colonies. Indeed, significant differences remain today between European and Indian cultures throughout South and Central America.

INCREASING LEVELS OF EXCHANGE

Europeans would not have been exploring the Americas at all without their early contacts with the natives. From them, they first learned of the rich deposits of gold and silver. After that, the history of the Americas became one of increasing levels of exchanges–some beneficial, some catastrophic–among different peoples and cultures.
The first and most profound result of this exchange was the importation of European diseases to the New World. It would be difficult to exaggerate the consequences of the exposure of Native Americans to such illnesses as influenza, measles, chicken pox, mumps, typhus, and above all smallpox–diseases to which Europeans had over time developed at least a partial immunity but to which Native Americans were tragically vulnerable. Millions died.

DEMOGRAPHIC CATASTROPHE

Native groups inhabiting some of the large Caribbean islands and some areas of Mexico were virtually extinct within fifty years of their first contact with whites. On Hispaniola–where the Dominican Republic and Haiti are today and where Columbus landed and established a small, short-lived colony in the 1490s–the native population quickly declined from approximately 1 million to about 500. In the Mayan areas of Mexico, as much as 95 percent of the population perished within a few years of their first contact with the Spanish. Some groups fared better than others; some of the tribes north of Mexico, whose contact with European settlers came later and less intimately, were spared the worst of the epidemics. But most areas of the New World experienced a demographic catastrophe at least as grave as, and in many places far worse than, the Black Death that had killed at least a third of the population of Europe two centuries before.

DELIBERATE SUBJUGATION AND EXTERMINATION

The decimation of native populations in the southern regions of the Americas was not, however, purely a result of this inadvertent exposure to infection. It was also a result of the conquistadores–deliberate policy of subjugation and extermination. Their brutality was in part a reflection of the ruthlessness with which Europeans waged war in all parts of the world. It was also a result of their conviction that the natives were “savages”–uncivilized peoples whom they considered somehow not fully human.

SMALLPOX AMONG THE INDIANS: Far more devastating to the Indians of America than the military ventures of Europeans were deadly diseases carried to the New World by invaders from the Old World. Natives had developed no immunity to the infectious diseases of Europe, and they died by the hundreds of thousands from such epidemics as measles, influenza, and (as depicted here by a European artist) smallpox.

Not all aspects of the exchange were so disastrous to the natives. The Europeans introduced important new crops to America (among them sugar and bananas), domestic livestock (cattle, pigs, and sheep), and perhaps most significantly the horse, which had disappeared from the Western Hemisphere in the Ice Age and now returned aboard Spanish ships in the sixteenth century. The Europeans imported these things for their own use. But Indian tribes soon learned to cultivate the new crops, and European livestock proliferated rapidly and spread widely among natives. In the past, most tribes had possessed no domesticated animals other than dogs. The horse, in particular, became central to the lives of many natives and transformed their societies.

NEW CROPS AND AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES

The exchange was at least as important (and far more beneficial) to the Europeans. In both North and South America, the arriving white peoples learned new agricultural techniques from the natives, techniques often better adapted to the character of the new land than those they had brought with them from Europe. They discovered new crops, above all maize (corn), which became an important staple among the settlers. Columbus took corn back to Europe from his first trip to America, and it soon spread through much of Europe as well. Such American foods as squash, pumpkins, beans, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes also found their way back to Europe and in the process revolutionized European agriculture. Agricultural discoveries ultimately proved more important to the future of Europe than the gold and silver the conquistadores valued so highly.

In South America, Central America, and Mexico, societies emerged in which Europeans and natives lived in intimate, if unequal, contact with one another. As a result, Indians adopted many features of European civilization. Many

natives gradually came to learn Spanish or Portuguese, but in the process they created a range of dialects, combining the European languages with their own. European missionaries–through both persuasion and coercion–spread Catholicism through most areas of the Spanish Empire. But native Christians tended to connect the new creed with features of their old religions, creating a hybrid of faiths that were, while essentially Christian, nevertheless distinctively American.

A Complex Racial Hierarchy

Colonial officials were expected to take their wives with them to America, but among the ordinary settlers–the majority–European men outnumbered European women by at least ten to one. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Spanish immigrants had substantial sexual contact with native women. Intermarriage became frequent, and before long the population of the colonies came to be dominated (numerically, at least) by people of mixed race, or *mestizos*. Through much of the Spanish Empire an elaborate racial hierarchy developed, with the Spanish at the top, natives at the bottom, and people of mixed races in between. Racial categories, however, were much more fluid than the Spanish wanted to believe and did not long remain fixed. Over time, the wealth and influence of a family often came to define its place in the "racial" hierarchy more decisively than race itself. Eventually, a successful or powerful person could become "Spanish" regardless of his or her actual ancestry.

Varied Labor Systems

Natives were the principal labor source for the Europeans. Virtually all the commercial, agricultural, and mining enterprises of the Spanish and Portuguese colonists depended on an Indian workforce. Different labor systems emerged in different areas of the Spanish Empire. In some places, Indians were sold into slavery. More often, colonists used a wage system closely related, but not identical, to slavery, by which Indians were forced to work in the mines and on the plantations for fixed periods, unable to leave without the consent of their employers. Such workforces survived in some areas of the South American mainland for many centuries. So great was the need for native labor that European settlers were less interested in acquiring land than they were in gaining control over Indian villages, which could become a source of labor.

Even so, the native population could not meet all the labor needs of the colonists–particularly since the native population had declined (and in some places virtually vanished) because of disease and war. As early as 1502, therefore, European settlers began importing slaves from Africa.

H. Africa and America

Most of the African men and women who were forcibly taken to America came from a large region in west Africa below the Sahara Desert, known as Guinea. It was the home of a wide variety of peoples and cultures. Since over half of all the new arrivals in the New World between 1500 and 1800 were Africans, those cultures greatly affected the character of American civilization. Europeans and white Americans came to portray African society as primitive and uncivilized (in part to justify the enslavement of Africa's people). But most Africans were civilized peoples with well-developed economies and political systems.

Ghana and Mali

Humans began settling in west Africa at least 10,000 years ago. By the fifteenth century CE, they had developed extensive civilizations and complex political systems. The residents of upper Guinea had substantial commercial contact with the Mediterranean world–trading ivory, gold, and slaves for finished goods. Largely as a result, they became early converts to Islam. After the collapse of the ancient kingdom of Ghana around 1100 CE, the even larger empire of Mali emerged and survived well into the fifteenth century. Its great city, Timbuktu, became fabled as a trading center and a seat of education.

Benin, Congo and Songhay

Africans farther south were more isolated from Europe and the Mediterranean. They were also more politically fragmented. The central social unit in much of the south was the village, which usually consisted of members of an extended family group. Some groups of villages united in small kingdoms–among them Benin, Congo, and Songhay. But no large empires emerged in the south comparable to the Ghana and Mali kingdoms farther north. Nevertheless, these southern societies also developed extensive trade–in woven fabrics, ceramics, and wooden and iron goods, as well as crops and livestock–both among themselves and, to a lesser degree, with the outside world.

The African civilizations naturally developed economies that reflected the climates and resources of their lands. In upper Guinea, fishing and rice cultivation, supplemented by the extensive trade with Mediterranean lands, were the foundation of the economy. Farther south, Africans grew wheat and other food crops, raised livestock, and fished. There were some nomadic tribes in the interior, which subsisted largely on hunting and gathering and developed less elaborate social systems. But most Africans were sedentary people, linked by elaborate political, economic, and familial relationships.

Matrilineal Societies

Like many Native American societies, but unlike those in Europe, African societies tended to be matrilineal–which means that people traced their heredity through, and inherited property from, their mothers rather than their fathers. When a couple married, the husband left his own family to join the family of his wife. Like most other peoples, Africans divided work by gender, but the nature of that division varied greatly from place to place. Women played a

major role, often the dominant role, in trade; in many areas they were the principal farmers (while the men hunted, fished, and raised livestock); and everywhere, they managed child care and food preparation. Most tribes also divided political power by gender, with men choosing leaders and systems for managing what they defined as male affairs and women choosing parallel leaders to handle female matters. Tribal chiefs generally were men (although in some places there was a female counterpart), but the position customarily passed down not to the chief's son but to the son of the chief's eldest sister. African societies, in short, were characterized by a greater degree of sexual equality than those of most other parts of the world at the time.

In those areas of west Africa where indigenous religions had survived the spread of Islam (which included most of the lands south of the empire of Mali), people worshiped many gods, whom they associated with various aspects of the natural world and whose spirits they believed lived in trees, rocks, forests, and streams. Most Africans also developed forms of ancestor worship and took great care in tracing family lineage; the most revered priests (who were often also important social and political leaders as well) were generally the oldest people in the tribe.

African societies had elaborate systems of social ranks (or hierarchies). Small elites of priests and nobles stood at the top. Most people belonged to a large middle group of farmers, traders, crafts workers, and others. At the bottom of society were slaves–men and women who were put into bondage after being captured in wars or because of criminal behavior or unpaid debts. Slavery in Africa was not usually permanent; people were generally placed in bondage for a fixed period and in the meantime retained certain legal protections (including the right to marry). Their children, moreover, did not inherit their parents' condition of bondage.

The African slave trade began long before the European migration to the New World. As early as the eighth century CE, west Africans began selling slaves to traders from the Mediterranean. They were responding to a demand from affluent families who wanted black men and women as domestic servants. They were also responding to more-general labor shortages in some areas of Europe and North Africa. When Portuguese sailors began exploring the coast of Africa in the fifteenth century, they too bought slaves–usually criminals and people captured in war–and took them back to Portugal, where there was a small but steady demand. By the 1500s, people from the Guinea region had moved into much of sub-Saharan Africa and traded gold, ivory, pepper, and many other precious commodities.

GROWTH OF THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

In the sixteenth century, however, the market for slaves grew dramatically as a result of the rising European demand for sugarcane. The small areas of sugar cultivation in the Mediterranean were proving inadequate, and production soon moved to the island of Madeira off the African coast, which became a Portuguese colony. Not long after that, it moved to the Caribbean islands and Brazil. Sugar was a labor-intensive crop, and the demand for workers in these new areas increased rapidly. European slave traders responded to that demand by increasing the recruitment of workers from along the coast of west Africa (and from some areas of east Africa as well). As the demand increased, African kingdoms warred with one another in an effort to capture potential slaves to exchange for European goods. At first the slave traders were overwhelmingly Portuguese and, to a lesser extent, Spanish. By the seventeenth century, the Dutch had won control of most of the slave market. In the eighteenth century, the English dominated it. (Despite some false claims, Jews were never significantly involved in the slave trade.) By 1700, slavery had begun to spread well beyond its original locations in the Caribbean and South America and into the English colonies to the north.

III. THE ARRIVAL OF THE ENGLISH

JOHN CABOT

England's first documented contact with the New World came only five years after Spain's. In 1497, John Cabot (like Columbus, a native of Genoa) sailed to the northeastern coast of North America on an expedition sponsored by King Henry VII. Other English navigators continued Cabot's unsuccessful search for a northwest passage through the New World to the Orient. They explored other areas of North America during the sixteenth century. But even though England claimed dominion over the lands its explorers surveyed, nearly a century passed before the English made any serious efforts to establish colonies there. Like other European nations, England had to experience an internal transformation before it could begin settling new lands. That transformation occurred in the sixteenth century.

A. THE COMMERCIAL INCENTIVE

Part of the attraction of the New World to the English was its newness, its contrast to their own troubled land. America seemed a place where human settlement could start anew, where a perfect society could be created without the flaws and inequities of the Old World. Such dreams began to emerge in England only a few years after Columbus's voyages. They found classic expression in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (published in Latin in 1516, translated into English thirty-five years later), which described a mythical and nearly perfect society on an imaginary island supposedly discovered by a companion of Amerigo Vespucci in the waters of the New World.

THE ENCLOSURE MOVEMENT

More's picture of an ideal community was, among other things, a comment on the social and economic ills of the England of his own time. The people of Tudor England suffered from frequent and costly European wars, from almost constant religious strife, and above all from a harsh economic transformation of the countryside. Because the worldwide demand for wool was growing rapidly, many landowners were finding it profitable to convert their land from fields for crops to pastures for sheep. The result was a significant growth in the wool trade. But that meant land

worked at one time by agricultural serfs and later by rent–paying tenant farmers was steadily enclosed for sheep runs and taken away from the farmers. Thousands of evicted tenants roamed the countryside in gangs, begging from (and at times robbing) the more fortunate householders through whose communities they passed.
The government passed various laws designed to halt enclosures, relieve the worthy poor, and compel the able-bodied or “sturdy beggars” to work. Such laws had little effect. The enclosure movement continued unabated, and few of the dislocated farmers could find reemployment in raising sheep or manufacturing wool. By removing land from cultivation, the enclosure movement also limited England's ability to feed its rising population, which grew from 3 million in 1485 to 4 million in 1603. Because of both the dislocation of farmers and the restriction of the food supply, therefore, England had a serious problem of surplus population.

CHARTERED COMPANIES

Amid this growing distress, a rising class of merchant capitalists was prospering from the expansion of foreign trade. At first, England had exported little except raw wool; but new merchant capitalists helped create a domestic cloth industry that allowed them to begin marketing finished goods at home and abroad. At first, most exporters did business almost entirely as individuals. In time, however, some merchants joined forces and formed chartered companies. Each such enterprise operated on the basis of a charter acquired from the monarch, which gave the company a monopoly for trading in a particular region. Among the first of these were the Muscovy Company (1555), the Levant Company (1581), the Barbary Company (1585), the Guinea Company (1588), and the East India Company (1600). Investors in these companies often made fantastic profits from the exchange of English manufactures, especially woolens, for exotic goods; and they felt a powerful urge to continue the expansion of their profitable trade.
Central to this drive was the emergence of a new concept of economic life known as mercantilism, which was gaining favor throughout Europe. Mercantilism rested on the assumption that the nation as a whole, not the individuals within it, was the principal actor in the economy. The goal of economic activity should be to increase the nation's total wealth. Mercantilists believed that the world's wealth was finite. One person or nation could grow rich only at the expense of another. A nation's economic health depended, therefore, on extracting as much wealth as possible from foreign lands and exporting as little wealth as possible from home.

MERCANTILISM

The principles of mercantilism guided the economic policies of virtually all the European nation-states in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Mercantilism greatly enhanced the position of the new merchant capitalists, whose overseas ventures were thought to benefit the entire nation and to be worthy of government assistance. It also increased competition among nations. Every European state was trying to find markets for its exports while trying to limit its imports. One result was the increased attractiveness of acquiring colonies, which could become the source of goods that a country might otherwise have to buy from other nations.

RICHARD HAKLUYT'S ARGUMENT FOR COLONIES

In England, the mercantilistic program thrived at first on the basis of the flourishing wool trade with the European continent and, particularly, with the great cloth market in Antwerp. Beginning in the 1550s, however, that glutted market collapsed, and English merchants found themselves obliged to look elsewhere for overseas trade. The establishment of colonies seemed to be a ready answer to that and other problems. Richard Hakluyt, an Oxford clergyman and the outstanding English propagandist for colonization, argued that colonies would not only create new markets for English goods, but they would also help alleviate poverty and unemployment by siphoning off the surplus population. For the poor who remained in England “idly to the annoy of the whole state,” there would be new work as a result of the prosperity the colonies would create. Perhaps most important, colonial commerce would allow England to acquire products from its own new territories for which the nation had previously been dependent on foreign rivals–products such as lumber, naval stores, and, above all, silver and gold.

B. THE RELIGIOUS INCENTIVE

In addition to these economic motives for colonization, there were religious ones, rooted in the events of the European and English Reformations. The Protestant Reformation began in Germany in 1517, when Martin Luther openly challenged some of the basic practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church–until then, the supreme religious authority and also one of the strongest political authorities throughout western Europe. Luther, an Augustinian monk and ordained priest, challenged the Catholic belief that salvation could be achieved through good works or through loyalty (or payments) to the Church itself. He denied the Church's claim that God communicated to the world through the pope and the clergy. The Bible, not the church, was the authentic voice of God, Luther claimed, and salvation was to be found not through “works” or through the formal practice of religion, but through faith alone. Luther's challenge quickly won him a wide following among ordinary men and women in northern Europe. He himself insisted that he was not revolting against the Church, that his purpose was to reform it from within. But when the pope excommunicated him in 1520, Luther defied him and began to lead his followers out of the Catholic Church entirely. A schism within European Christianity had begun that was never to be healed.

EUROPE AND WEST AFRICA IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY:
Exploration of North and South America was in part an outgrowth of earlier European trade in the Eastern Hemisphere. Europeans delivered cloth and other manufactures to northern Africa; then camels carried the cargoes across the Sahara to cities such as Timbuktu, Gao, and Djenné. There they loaded gold, ivory, and kola nuts for return to the Mediterranean. Africans also traded with Asia to obtain cloth, porcelain, and spices.

- ***What areas of trade were most important to the early interaction between Africa and the Americas?***

DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

As the spirit of the Reformation spread rapidly throughout Europe, other dissidents began offering alternatives to orthodox Catholicism. The French theologian John Calvin was, after Luther, the most influential reformer and went even further than Luther had in rejecting the Catholic belief that human institutions could affect an individual's prospects for salvation. Calvin introduced the doctrine of predestination. God “elected” some people to be saved and condemned others to damnation; each person's destiny was determined before birth, and no one could change that predetermined fate. But while individuals could not alter their destinies, they could strive to know them. Calvinists believed that the way people led their lives might reveal to them their chances of salvation. A wicked or useless existence would be a sign of damnation; saintliness, diligence, and success could be signs of grace. Calvinism created anxieties among its followers, to be sure; but it also produced a strong incentive to lead virtuous, productive lives. The new creed spread rapidly throughout northern Europe and produced (among other groups) the Huguenots in France and the Puritans in England.

THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

The English Reformation was very different from the Protestant Reformation. It occurred more because of a political dispute between the king and the pope than as a result of doctrinal revolts. In 1529, King Henry VIII became angered by the pope's refusal to grant him a divorce from his Spanish wife (who had failed to bear him the son he desperately wanted). In response, he broke England's ties with the Catholic Church and established himself as the head of the Christian faith in his country. He made relatively few other changes in English Christianity, however, and after his death the survival of Protestantism remained in doubt for a time. When Henry's Catholic daughter Mary ascended the throne, she quickly restored England's allegiance to Rome and harshly persecuted those who refused to return to the Catholic fold. Many Protestants were executed (the origin of the queen's enduring nickname, “Bloody Mary”); others fled to the European continent, where they came into contact with the most radical ideas of the Reformation. Mary died in 1558, and her half-sister, Elizabeth, became England's sovereign. Elizabeth once again severed the nation's connection with the Catholic Church (and, along with it, an alliance with Spain that Mary had forged).
The Church of England, as the official religion was now known, satisfied the political objectives of the queen, but it failed to satisfy the religious desires of many English Christians. Catholics continued to assert allegiance to the pope. More important, many Protestants believed that the “reformation” did not create enough changes in theology. The most ardent Protestants became known as “Puritans,” because they hoped to “purify” the church.

PURITAN SEPARATISTS

Some Puritans took genuinely radical positions. They were known as Separatists, and they were determined to worship as they pleased in their own independent congregations. That flew in the face of English law–which outlawed unauthorized religious meetings, required all subjects to attend regular Anglican services, and levied taxes to support the established church. The radicalism of the Separatists was visible in their rejection of prevailing assumptions about the proper religious roles of women. Many Separatist sects, perhaps most prominently the Quakers, permitted women to serve as preachers, which would have been impossible in the established church.
Most Puritans resisted separatism. Still, their demands were by no means modest. They wanted to simplify Anglican forms of worship. They wanted to reduce the power of the bishops, who were appointed by the Crown and who were, in many cases, openly corrupt and highly extravagant. Perhaps above all they wanted to reform the local clergy, many of them greedy, uneducated men with little interest in (or knowledge of) theology.

PURITAN DISCONTENT

Puritan discontent, already festering, grew rapidly after the death of Elizabeth, the last of the Tudors, and the accession to the throne of James I, a Scotsman and the first of the Stuarts, in 1603. James believed kings ruled by divine right, and he felt no obligation to compromise with his opponents. He quickly antagonized the Puritans, a group that included most of the rising businessmen, by resorting to arbitrary taxation, by favoring English Catholics in granting charters and other favors, and by supporting “high church” forms of ceremony. By the early seventeenth century, some religious nonconformists were beginning to look for places of refuge outside the kingdom. Along with the other economic and social incentives for colonization, such religious discontent helped turn England's gaze to distant lands.

C. THE ENGLISH IN IRELAND

England's first experience with colonization came not in the New World, but in a land separated from Britain only by a narrow stretch of sea: Ireland. The English had long laid claim to the island and had for many years maintained small settlements in the area around Dublin. Only in the second half of the sixteenth century, however, did serious efforts at large-scale colonization begin. During the 1560s and 1570s, would-be colonists moved through Ireland, capturing territory and attempting to subdue the native population. In the process they developed many of the assumptions that would guide later English colonists in America.

LEFT: ELIZABETH I: This is the Kitchener Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) painted by an unknown artist in the English style. In this portrait, the artist conveys Elizabeth as she was seen by many of her contemporaries: a strong, confident ruler, richly dressed, presiding over an ambitious, increasingly prosperous, and expansionist state.
(Private Collection /© Mallett Gallery, London, UK / The Bridgeman Art Library)
RIGHT: THE DOCKS OF BRISTOL, ENGLAND: By the eighteenth century, when this scene was painted, Bristol had become one of the principal English ports serving the so-called triangular trade among the American colonies, the West Indies, and Africa. The lucrativeness of that trade is evident in the bustle and obvious prosperity of the town. Even earlier, however, Bristol was an important port of embarkation for the thousands of English settlers migrating to the New World.
(*Docks and Quay.* English School (18th Century). City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery/The Bridgeman Art Library, London)

SUBJUGATION OF IRELAND

The most important of these assumptions was that the native population of Ireland–approximately 1 million people, loyal to the Catholic Church, with their own language (Gaelic) and their own culture–was a collection of wild, vicious, and ignorant “savages.” The Irish lived in ways the English considered crude and wasteful (“like beasts”), and they fought back against the intruders with a ferocity that the English considered barbaric. Such people could not be tamed, the English concluded. They certainly could not be assimilated into English society. They must, therefore, be suppressed, isolated, and if necessary destroyed. Eventually, they might be “civilized,” but only after they were thoroughly subordinated.

Whatever barbarities the Irish may have inflicted on the colonizers, the English more than matched them in return. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who was later to establish the first British colony in the New World (an unsuccessful venture in Newfoundland), served for a time as governor of one Irish district and suppressed native rebellions with extraordinary viciousness. Gilbert was an educated and supposedly civilized man. But he considered the natives less than human and therefore not entitled to whatever decencies civilized people reserved for their treatment of one another. As a result, he managed to justify, both to himself and to others, such atrocities as beheading Irish soldiers after they were killed in battle. Gilbert himself, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Richard Grenville, and others active in Ireland in the mid-sixteenth century derived from their experiences there an outlook they would take to America, where they made similarly vicious efforts to subdue and subjugate the natives.

THE PLANTATION MODEL

The Irish experience led the English to another important (and related) assumption about colonization: that English settlements in distant lands must retain a rigid separation from the native populations. In Ireland, English colonizers established what they called “plantations,” transplantations of English society in a foreign land. Unlike the Spanish in America, the English in Ireland did not try simply to rule a subdued native population; they tried to build a separate society, peopled with emigrants from England itself. The new society would exist within a “pale of settlement,” an area physically separated from the natives. That concept, too, they would take with them to the New World, even though in Ireland, as later in America, the separation of peoples and the preservation of “pure” English culture proved impossible.

D. THE FRENCH AND THE DUTCH IN AMERICA

English settlers in North America, unlike those in Ireland, would encounter not only natives but also other Europeans who were, like them, driven by mercantilist ideas to establish economic outposts abroad. To the south and southwest was the Spanish Empire. Spanish ships continued to threaten English settlements along the coast for years. But except for Mexico and scattered outposts such as those in Florida and New Mexico, the Spanish made little serious effort to colonize North America.

COUREURS DE BOIS

England's more formidable North American rivals in the early sixteenth century were the French. France founded its first permanent settlement in America at Quebec in 1608, less than a year after the English started their first colony at Jamestown. The French colony's population grew very slowly. Few French Catholics felt any inclination to leave their homeland, and French Protestants who might have wished to emigrate were excluded from the colony. The French, however, exercised an influence in the New World disproportionate to their numbers, largely because of their relationships with Native Americans. Unlike the English, who for many years hugged the coastline and traded with the Indians of the interior through intermediaries, the French forged close, direct ties with natives deep inside the continent. French Jesuit missionaries were among the first to penetrate Indian societies, and they established some of the first contacts between the two peoples. More important still were the *coureurs de bois*–adventurous fur traders and trappers–who also moved far into the wilderness and developed an extensive trade that became one of the underpinnings of the French colonial economy.

The fur trade was, in fact, more an Indian than a French enterprise. The *coureurs de bois* were, in many ways, little more than agents for the Algonquins and the Hurons, who were the principal fur traders among the Indians of the region and from whom the French purchased their pelts. The French traders were able to function only to the degree that they could form partnerships with the Indians. Successful partnerships often resulted from their ability to become a part of native society, living among the Indians and at times marrying Indian women. The fur trade helped open the way for the other elements of the French presence in North America–the agricultural estates (or *seigneuries*) along the St. Lawrence River, the development of trade and military centers at Quebec and Montreal, and the creation of an alliance with the Algonquins and others–that enabled the French to compete with the more numerous British in the contest for control of North America. That alliance also brought the French into conflict with the Iroquois, the Algonquins' ancient enemies, who assumed the central role in the English fur trade. An early result of these tensions was a 1609 attack led by Samuel de Champlain, the founder of Quebec, on a band of Mohawks, apparently at the instigation of his Algonquin trading partners.

HENRY HUDSON

The Dutch, too, were establishing a presence in North America. The Netherlands had won its independence from Spain in the early seventeenth century and had become one of the leading trading nations of the world. Its merchant fleet was larger than England's, and its traders were active not only in Europe but also in Africa, Asia, and–increasingly–America. In 1609, an English explorer in the employ of the Dutch, Henry Hudson, sailed up the river that was to be named for him in what is now New York State. Because the river was so wide, he believed for a time that he had found the long-sought water route through the continent to the Pacific. He was wrong, of course, but his explorations led to a Dutch claim on territory in America and to the establishment of a permanent Dutch presence in the New World.

THE "RESTITUTION" OF NEW AMSTERDAM: **This is a detail from an elaborate engraving created to celebrate the "Restitutio" (or return) of New Amsterdam to the Dutch in 1673. England had captured New Amsterdam in 1664 and made claim to the entire province of New Netherland. But in 1672, war broke out between England and the Netherlands, and the Dutch recaptured their lost province. In celebration of that event, this heroic picture of the Dutch fleet in New York was created for sale in the Netherlands. Early in 1674, at the conclusion of the war, the Dutch returned the colony to England.**

NEW AMSTERDAM

For more than a decade after Hudson's voyage, the Dutch maintained an active trade in furs in and around present-day New York. In 1624, the Dutch West India Company established a series of permanent trading posts on the Hudson, Delaware, and Connecticut Rivers. The company actively encouraged settlement of the region–not just from Holland itself, but also from such other parts of northern Europe as Germany, Sweden, and Finland. It transported whole families to the New World and granted vast feudal estates to landlords (known as "patroons") on condition that they bring still more immigrants to America. The result was the colony of New Netherland and its principal town, New Amsterdam, on Manhattan Island. Its population, diverse as it was, remained relatively small; the colony was only loosely united, with chronically weak leadership.

E. THE FIRST ENGLISH SETTLEMENTS

The first enduring English settlement in the New World was established at Jamestown, in Virginia, in 1607. But for nearly thirty years before that, English merchants and adventurers had been engaged in a series of failed efforts to create colonies in America. Through much of the sixteenth century, the English had mixed feelings about the New World. They knew of its existence, and they were intrigued by its possibilities. Under the leadership of Elizabeth I, they were developing a powerful sense of nationalism that encouraged dreams of expansion. At the same time, however, England was leery of Spain, which remained the dominant force in America and, it seemed, the dominant naval power in Europe.

THE SPANISH ARMADA

But much changed in the 1570s and 1580s. English "sea dogs" such as Sir Francis Drake staged successful raids on Spanish merchant ships and built confidence in England's ability to challenge Spanish sea power. More important was the attempted invasion of England in 1588. Philip II, the powerful Spanish king, had recently united his nation with Portugal. He was now determined to end England's challenges to Spanish commercial supremacy and to bring the English back into the Catholic Church. He assembled one of the largest military fleets in the history of warfare–known to history as the "Spanish Armada"–to carry his troops across the English Channel and into England itself. Philip's bold venture turned into a fiasco when the smaller English fleet dispersed the Armada and, in a single stroke, ended Spain's domination of the Atlantic. The English now felt much freer to establish themselves in the New World. The pioneers of English colonization were Sir Humphrey Gilbert and his half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh–both friends of Queen Elizabeth and both veterans of the earlier colonial efforts in Ireland. In 1578, Gilbert obtained from Elizabeth a patent granting him the exclusive right for six years "to inhabit and possess at his choice all remote and heathen lands not in the actual possession of any Christian prince."

GILBERT'S EXPEDITION TO NEWFOUNDLAND

After numerous setbacks, Gilbert led an expedition to Newfoundland in 1583 and took possession of it in the queen's name. He proceeded southward along the coast, looking for a good place to build a military outpost that might eventually grow into a profitable colony. But a storm sank his ship, and he was lost at sea.

F. ROANOKE

Raleigh was undeterred by Gilbert's misfortune. The next year, he secured from Elizabeth a six-year grant similar to Gilbert's and sent a small group of men on an expedition to explore the North American coast. They returned with two captive Indians and glowing reports of what they had seen. They were particularly enthusiastic about an island the natives called Roanoke and about the area of the mainland just beyond it (in what is now North Carolina). Raleigh asked the queen for permission to name the entire region “Virginia” in honor of Elizabeth, “the Virgin Queen.” But while Elizabeth granted the permission, she did not offer the financial assistance Raleigh had hoped his flattery would produce. So he turned to private investors to finance another expedition.

THE FIRST ROANOKE COLONY

In 1585 Raleigh recruited his cousin, Sir Richard Grenville, to lead a group of men (most of them from the English plantations in Ireland) to Roanoke to establish a colony. Grenville deposited the settlers on the island, remained long enough to antagonize the natives by razing an Indian village as retaliation for a minor theft, and returned to England. The following spring, Sir Francis Drake unexpectedly arrived in Roanoke. With supplies and reinforcements from England long overdue, the beleaguered colonists boarded Drake's ships and left.

ROANOKE:
A drawing by one of the English colonists in the ill-fated Roanoke expedition of 1585 became the basis for this engraving by Theodor de Bry, published in England in 1590. A small European ship carrying settlers approaches the island of Roanoke, at left. The wreckage of several larger vessels farther out to sea and the presence of Indian settlements on the mainland and on Roanoke itself suggest some of the perils the settlers encountered.

Raleigh tried again in 1587, sending an expedition carrying ninety-one men, seventeen women (two of them pregnant), and nine children–the nucleus, he hoped, of a viable “plantation.” The settlers landed on Roanoke and attempted to take up where the first group of colonists had left off. (Shortly after arriving, one of the women–the daughter of the commander of the expedition, John White–gave birth to a daughter, Virginia Dare, the first American-born child of English parents.) White returned to England after several weeks (leaving his daughter and granddaughter behind) in search of supplies and additional settlers; he hoped to return in a few months. But the hostilities with Spain intervened, and White did not return to the island for three years. When he did, in 1590, he found the island deserted, with no clue to the settlers–fate other than the cryptic inscription “Croatoan” carved on a post. Some historians have argued that the colonists were slaughtered by the Indians in retaliation for Grenville's hostilities. Others have contended that they left their settlement and joined native society, ultimately becoming entirely assimilated. But no conclusive solution to the mystery of the “Lost Colony” has ever been found.
The Roanoke mystery marked the end of Sir Walter Raleigh's involvement in English colonization of the New World. In 1603, when James I succeeded Elizabeth to the throne, Raleigh was accused of plotting against the king, stripped of his monopoly, and imprisoned for more than a decade. Finally (after being released for one last ill-fated maritime expedition), he was executed by the king in 1618. No later colonizer would receive grants of land in the New World as vast or undefined as those Raleigh and Gilbert had acquired. But despite the discouraging example of these early experiences, the colonizing impulse remained alive.

NEW COLONIAL CHARTERS

In the first years of the seventeenth century, a group of London merchants to whom Raleigh had assigned his charter rights decided to renew the attempt at colonization in Virginia. A rival group of merchants, from Plymouth and other West Country towns, were also interested in American ventures and were sponsoring voyages of exploration farther north, up to Newfoundland, where West Country fishermen had been going for many years. In 1606 James I issued a new charter, which divided America between the two groups. The London group got the exclusive right to colonize in the south, and the Plymouth merchants received the same right in the north. Through their efforts, the first enduring English colonies were planted in America.

LOOKING BACK

The lands that Europeans eventually named the Americas were the home of many millions of people before the arrival of Columbus. Having migrated from Asia thousands of years earlier, the pre-Columbian Americans spread throughout the Western Hemisphere and eventually created great civilizations. Among the most notable of them were the Incas in Peru, and the Mayas and Aztecs in Mexico. In the regions north of what was later named the Rio Grande, the human population was smaller and the civilizations less advanced than they were farther south. Even so, North American natives created a cluster of civilizations that thrived and expanded. There were several million people living north of Mexico by the time Columbus arrived.

In the century after European contact, these native populations suffered a series of catastrophes that all but destroyed the civilizations they had built: brutal invasions by Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores and, even more devastating, a series of plagues inadvertently imported by Europeans that decimated native populations. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Spanish and Portuguese–no longer faced with effective resistance from the native populations–had established colonial control over all of South America and much of North America, creating one of the largest empires in the world.

In the parts of North America that would eventually become the United States, the European presence was for a time much less powerful. The Spanish established an important northern outpost in what is now New Mexico, a society in which Europeans and Indians lived together intimately, if unequally. They created a fort at St. Augustine, Florida. On the whole, however, the North American Indians remained largely undisturbed by Europeans until the English, French, and Dutch migrations began in the early seventeenth century.

KEY TERMS/ PEOPLE/ PLACES/ EVENTS

Archaic period

Black Death

Cahokia

Christopher Columbus

Clovis people

Conquistadores

Coureurs de bois

Encomienda

Henry Hudson

Jamestown

Matrilineal

Mercantilism

Meso-Americans

Mestizos

Protestant Reformation

Puritans

Roanoke

Samuel de Champlain

Seigneuries

Separatists

Sir Humphrey Gilbert

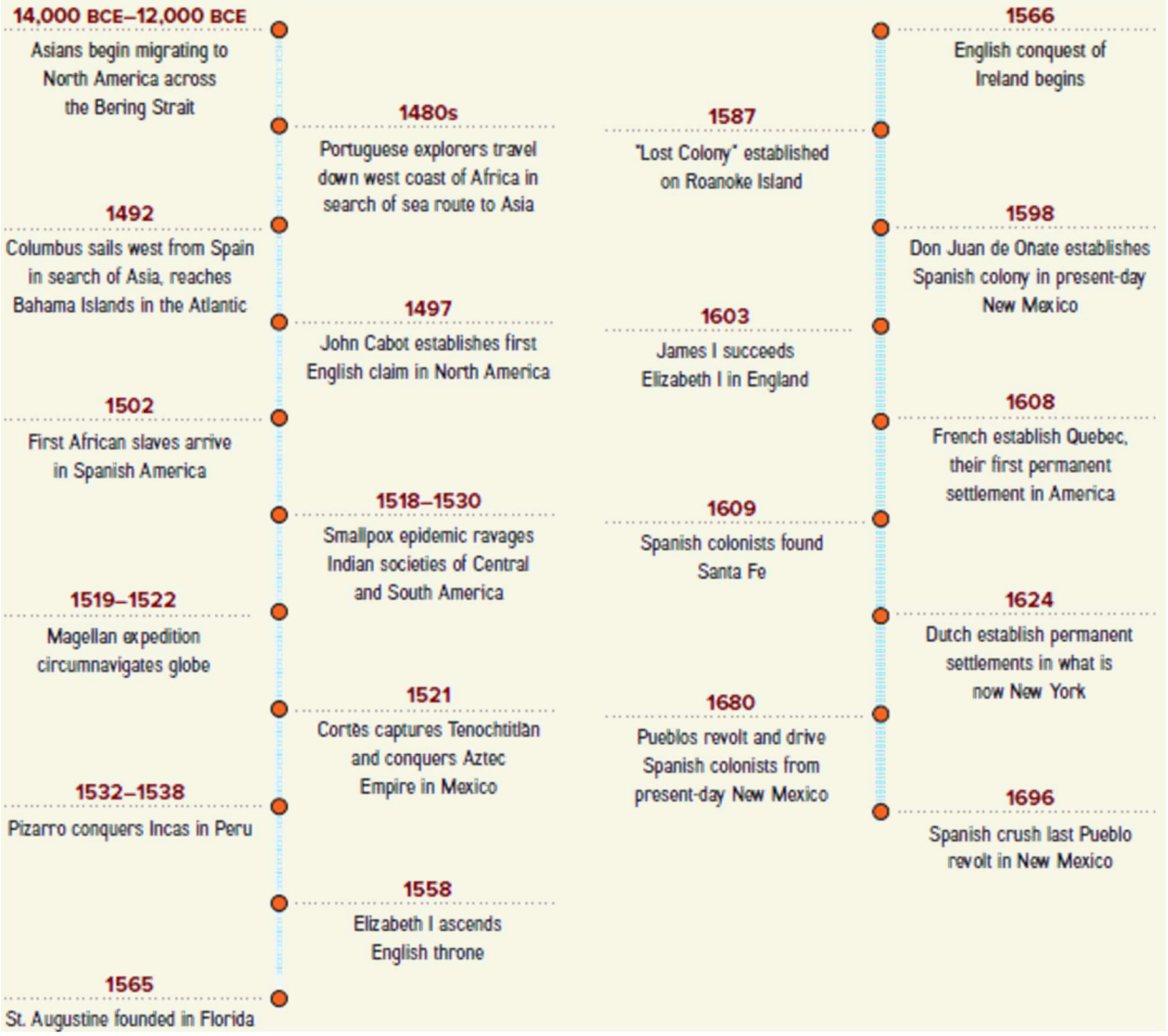
Sir Walter Raleigh

Tenochtitlán

RECALL AND REFLECT

1. How did contact between the European arrivals and the native peoples of the Americas affect both groups?
2. How did Spanish settlement in America differ from English, Dutch, and French settlement?
3. What were the effects of the importation of African slaves into the Americas?
4. What is mercantilism and what did it have to do with the European colonization of North America?
5. How did the English experience at colonization in Ireland affect English colonization in America?

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS



DEBATING THE PAST

WHY DO HISTORIANS SO OFTEN DIFFER?

EARLY in the twentieth century, when the professional study of history was still relatively new, many historians believed that questions about the past could be answered with the same certainty and precision that questions in more-scientific fields could be answered. By sifting through available records, using precise methods of research and analysis, and producing careful, closely argued accounts of the past, they believed they could create definitive histories that would survive without controversy. Scholars who adhered to this view believed that real knowledge can be derived only from direct, scientific observation of clear "facts". They were known as "positivists."

A vigorous debate continues to this day over whether historical research can or should be truly objective. Almost no historian any longer accepts the "positivist" claim that history could ever be an exact science. Disagreement about the past is, in fact, at the heart of the effort to understand history. Critics of contemporary historical scholarship often denounce the way historians are constantly revising earlier interpretations. Some denounce the act of interpretation itself. History, they claim, is "what happened," and historians should "stick to the facts."

Historians, however, continue to differ with one another both because the "facts" are seldom as straightforward as their critics claim and because facts by themselves mean almost nothing without an effort to assign meaning to them. Some historical "facts," of course, are not in dispute. Everyone agrees, for example, that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and that Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860. But many other "facts" are much harder to determine–among them, for example, the question of how large the American population was before the arrival of Columbus, which is discussed in this chapter. How many slaves resisted slavery? This sounds like a reasonably straightforward question, but it is almost impossible to answer with any certainty–because the records of slave resistance are spotty and the definition of "resistance" is a matter of considerable dispute.

Even when a set of facts is clear and straightforward, historians disagree–sometimes quite radically–over what they mean. Those disagreements can be the result of political and ideological disagreements. Some of the most vigorous debates in recent decades have been between scholars who believe that economic interests and class divisions are the key to understanding the past, and those who believe that ideas and culture are at least as important as material interests. Whites and people of color, men and women, people from the American South and people from the North, young people and older people: these and many other points of difference find their way into scholarly disagreements. Debates can also occur over differences in methodology–between those who believe that quantitative studies can answer important historical questions and those who believe that other methods come closer to the truth.

Most of all historical interpretation changes in response to the time in which it is written. Historians may strive to be "objective" in their work, but no one can be entirely free from the assumptions and concerns of the present. In the 1950s, the omnipresent shadow of the Cold War had a profound effect on the way most historians viewed the past. In the 1960s, concerns about racial justice and disillusionment with the Vietnam War altered the way many historians viewed the past. Those events introduced a much more critical tone to scholarship and turned the attention of scholars away from politics and government and toward the study of society and culture.

Many areas of scholarship in recent decades are embroiled in a profound debate over whether there is such a thing as "truth." The world, some scholars argue, is simply a series of "narratives" constructed by people who view life in very different and often highly personal ways. "Truth" does not really exist. Everything is a product of interpretation. Not many historians embrace such radical ideas; most would agree that interpretations, to be of any value, must rest on a solid foundation of observable facts. But historians do recognize that even the most compelling facts are subject to many different interpretations and that the process of understanding the past is a forever continuing–and forever contested–process.

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, AND EVALUATE

1. What are some of the reasons historians so often disagree?

2. Is there ever a "right" or "wrong" in historical interpretation? What value might historical inquiry have other than reaching a "right" or "wrong" conclusion?

3. If historians so often disagree, how should a student of history approach historical content? How might disagreement expand our understanding of history?

DEBATING THE PAST

THE AMERICAN POPULATION BEFORE COLUMBUS

NO one knows how many people lived in the Americas in the centuries before Columbus. But scholars and other researchers have spent more than a century and have written many thousands of pages debating the question nevertheless. Interest in this question survives, despite the near impossibility of answering it. The debate over the pre-Columbian population is closely connected to the much larger debate over the consequences of European settlement of the Western Hemisphere.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Native Americans spoke often of the great days before Columbus when there were many more people in their tribes. They drew from their own rich tradition of oral history handed down through storytelling from one generation to another. The painter and ethnographer George Catlin spent much time among the tribes in the 1830s painting portraits of a race that he feared was “fast passing to extinction”. He listened to these oral legends and estimated that there had been 16 million Indians in North America before the Europeans came. Other white Americans dismissed such claims as preposterous, insisting that Indian civilization was far too primitive to have been able to sustain so large a population.

In 1928, James Mooney, an ethnologist at the Smithsonian Institution, drew from early accounts of soldiers and missionaries in the sixteenth century. He came up with the implausibly precise figure of 1.15 million natives who lived north of Mexico in the early sixteenth century. That was a larger figure than nineteenth-century writers had suggested, but still much smaller than the Indians themselves claimed. A few years later, the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber used many of Mooney's methods and come up with an estimate of the population of the entire Western Hemisphere–considerably larger than Mooney's, but much lower than Catlin's. He concluded in 1934 that there were 8.4 million people in the Americas in 1492, half in North America and half in the Caribbean and South America.

These low early estimates reflected an assumption that the arrival of the Europeans did not much reduce the native population. But in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars discovered that the early tribes had been catastrophically decimated by European plagues not long after the arrival of Columbus–meaning that the numbers Europeans observed even in the late 1500s were already dramatically smaller than the numbers in 1492. Drawing on early work by anthropologists and others who discovered evidence of widespread deaths by disease, historians William McNeill in 1976 and Alfred Crosby a decade later, as well as other scholars, produced powerful accounts of the near extinction of some tribes and the dramatic depopulation of others in a pestilential catastrophe with few parallels in history. Almost all scholars now accept that much, perhaps most, of the native population was wiped out by disease–smallpox, measles, tuberculosis, and other plagues imported from Europe.

Henry Dobyns, an anthropologist who was one of the earliest scholars to challenge the early, low estimates, claimed in 1966 that in 1492 there were between 10 and 12 million people north of Mexico and between 90 and 112 million in all of the Americas. No subsequent scholar has made so high a claim, but most estimates that followed have been much closer to Dobyns's than to Kroeber's. The geographer William M. Denevan, for example, argued in 1976 that the American population in 1492 was around 55 million and that the population north of Mexico was under 4 million. Those are among the lowest of modern estimates, but still dramatically higher than the nineteenth-century numbers.

The vehemence with which scholars have debated these figures is not just because it is very difficult to determine population size. It is also because the debate over the population is part of the debate over whether the arrival of Columbus–and the millions of Europeans who followed him–was a great advance in the history of civilization or an unparalleled catastrophe that exterminated a large and flourishing native population. How to balance the many achievements of European civilization in the New World after 1492 against the terrible destruction of native peoples that accompanied it is, in the end, less a historical question, perhaps, than a moral one.

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, AND EVALUATE

1. Why is there such interest in and such vehement disagreement about the population of native peoples of the Americas in the precontact period?

2. What are some of the difficulties in trying to determine the size of the pre-Columbian population?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using oral history as a source of information about the past?

AMERICA IN THE WORLD

THE ATLANTIC CONTEXT OF EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY

MOST Americans understand that in the twenty-first century our nation has become intimately bound up with the rest of the world–that we live in a time that is often called the "age of globalization." But globalization long preceded our own time, and historians have recently come to recognize that the "New World" of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America was part of a vast network of connections that has become known as the "Atlantic World."

The idea of an "Atlantic World" rests in part on the obvious connections between western Europe and the Spanish, British, French, and Dutch colonies in North and South America. The massive European emigration to the Americas beginning in the sixteenth century, the defeat and devastation of native populations, the creation of European agricultural and urban settlements, and the imposition of imperial regulations on trade, commerce, landowning, and political life–all of these forces reveal the influence of Old World imperialism on the history of the New World.

Although some Europeans traveled to the New World to escape oppression or to search for adventure, the great majority of European emigrants were in search of economic opportunity. Not surprisingly, therefore, the European settlements in the Americas were almost from the start connected to Europe through the growth of commerce between them. The commercial relationship between America and Europe was responsible not just for the growth of trade, but also for the increases in migration over time–as the demand for labor in the New World drew more and more settlers from the Old World. Commerce was also the principal reason for the rise of slavery in the Americas, and for the growth of the slave trade between European America and Africa. The Atlantic World, in other words, included not just Europe and the Americas, but Africa as well.

Religion was another force binding together the Atlantic World. The vast majority of people of European descent were Christians, and most of them maintained important religious ties to Europe. Catholics, of course, were part of a hierarchical church based in Rome and maintained close ties with the Vatican. But the Protestant faiths that predominated in North America were linked to their European counterparts as well. New religious ideas and movements spread back and forth across the Atlantic with astonishing speed. Great revivals that began in Europe moved quickly to America. The "Great Awakening" of the mid-eighteenth century, for example, began in Britain and traveled to America in large part through the efforts of the English evangelist George Whitefield. American evangelists later carried religious ideas from the New World back to the Old.

The early history of European America was also closely bound up with the intellectual life of Europe. The Enlightenment–the cluster of ideas that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasizing the power of human reason–moved quickly to the Americas, producing considerable intellectual ferment throughout the New World, but particularly in the British colonies in North America and the Caribbean. Many of the ideas that lay behind the American Revolution were products of British and French philosophy that had traveled across the Atlantic. The reinterpretation of those ideas by Americans to help justify their drive to independence–by, among others, Thomas Paine–moved back across the Atlantic to Europe and helped to inspire the French Revolution. Scientific and technological knowledge–another product of the Enlightenment–moved rapidly back and forth across the Atlantic. Americans borrowed industrial technology from Britain. Europe acquired much of its early knowledge of electricity from experiments done in America. But the Enlightenment was only one part of the continuing intellectual connections within the Atlantic World, connections that spread artistic, scholarly, and political ideas widely through the lands bordering the ocean.

Instead of thinking of the early history of what became the United States simply as the story of the growth of thirteen small colonies along the Atlantic seaboard of North America, the idea of the "Atlantic World" encourages us to think of early American history as a vast pattern of exchanges and interactions–trade, migration, religious and intellectual exchange, and many other relationships–among all the societies bordering the Atlantic: western Europe, western Africa, the Caribbean, and North and South America.

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, AND EVALUATE

1. What was the Atlantic World?

2. What has led historians to begin studying the idea of an Atlantic World?

3. Does studying American history in an Atlantic World context broaden or distort our understanding of American history?

AMERICA IN THE WORLD

MERCANTILISM AND COLONIAL COMMERCE

FOR more than two centuries, the economic life of Europe and its growing colonial possessions (the North American colonies among them) was shaped by a theory known as mercantilism. The actual application of mercantilism differed from country to country and empire to empire. But virtually all versions of mercantilism shared a belief in the economic importance of colonies to the health of the colonizing nations. As a result, mercantilism helped spur the growth of European empires around the world.

In one sense, mercantilism was a highly nationalist, as opposed to a global, theory. It rested on the conviction that the nation (not the individual) was at the center of economic life and that each nation should work to maximize its own share of the finite wealth for which all nations were competing. A gain for France, mercantilism taught, was in effect a loss for Britain or Spain. Thus, it encouraged each nation to work for itself and to attempt to weaken its rivals. But mercantilism was also a global force. What made it so was not the modern notion of the value of international economic growth but, rather, the belief that each nation must search for its own sources of trade and raw materials around the world. Every European state was trying to find markets for its exports, which would bring wealth into the nation, while trying to limit imports, which would transfer wealth to others. (Most of these central mercantilist tenets would eventually be overturned in Adam Smith's 1776 tract, *The Wealth of Nations,* which instead advocated free trade among nations and individual self-interest over national largesse as the route to increasing global–and thus national–wealth.)

In a mercantilist economy, colonies were critical to a nation's economic well-being. They served both as providers of raw materials and as markets for finished goods. Colonies, mercantilism taught, should trade only with their mother nation, and the direction of wealth should flow only in one direction, toward the center of the empire. Naval power became an integral part of the mercantilist idea. Only by controlling the sea lanes between the colonies and the homeland could a nation preserve its favorable balance of trade.

Despite the common assumptions underlying all forms of mercantilism, the system took many different forms, often depending on whether colonial merchants or state bureaucrats drove the economic discussion. In England, Spain, and the Netherlands, mercantilism was closely identified with the emerging middle class, who stood to profit personally from the increased trade. (Hence the term “mercantilism,” from merchant.) In France and Germany, on the other hand, state officials rather than private citizens laid more of the groundwork for mercantilism principles. In France, mercantilism was often known as “Colbertism,” after its primary proponent, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, foreign minister under Louis XIV. In Germany, the theory was known as “cameralism,” for the *Kammer,* or royal treasury.

In its early years, mercantilism was closely associated with “bullionism,” which is the theory that only gold and silver defined a nation's wealth. As such, the early Spanish colonies of the New World, in particular, emphasized the procurement of gold, silver, and other precious metals for the mother nation. (English colonies such as Jamestown were founded in part with the same intention, but they were much less successful at finding precious metals.) But even when gold and silver were scarce, colonies could still provide other important resources for the imperial capitals–for example, fur, timber, sugar, tobacco, and slaves.

The theory of mercantilism taught that wealth creation was a zero-sum game: there was a fixed amount of wealth in the world, and any wealth a nation acquired was, in effect, taken away from some other nation. As a result, mercantilists believed that nations should heavily regulate the economic affairs of their colonies. One good example of this was England's passage of the Navigation Acts in the 1660s, laws that sharply restricted colonial trade with anyone else but England. But England was not alone in passing such restrictions. Spain took equally definitive control over its colonial economies, passing similarly intensive regulation and insisting until 1720 that all colonial trade pass through the port of Seville.

Still, naval vessels could not be everywhere at once. And despite the many laws restricting colonial economies to their home nations, many colonial merchants around the world struck up trade with their nonaffiliated neighbors when possible. The French, Spanish, and Dutch West Indies in particular became the site of a thriving intercolonial trade that was not, for all intent and purposes, legal according to mercantilist doctrine. Indeed, so many traders from so many countries violated mercantile laws in the eighteenth century, and so many of them amassed great profits in the process, the mercantilist system gradually began to unravel. By the time of the American Revolution, in part a result of the colonists' resistance to mercantilist policies, the patterns of global trade were already moving toward the less-regulated trading patterns of the modern capitalist world.

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, AND EVALUATE

1. What effect did mercantilism have on colonial economies? Did the effects differ according to which European nation owned the colony?
2. How did mercantilism contribute to power rivalries among the European nations?
3. Mercantilism as a nation's driving economic force has largely given way to economic globalization, that is, the increased interdependence of nations' economies. Why do you think this is so?