

Chapter Three:

Initial Contact and Conquest

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

The discovery of the New World in 1492 was one of the most important events in world history. Over the next two hundred years, the world underwent a rapid transformation in various areas of knowledge: geography, demographics, botany, anthropology, and history. European nations were also changed and challenged politically as they attempted to exert their control over these new lands. Although what would become the United States of America came to be dominated by English colonies, English models of colonialism were not the earliest or most powerful models of colonial control to emerge in the Americas. This chapter will explore the experience of first contact between the hemispheres in the forms of interactions between Europeans and Indians, developing and differing models of colonial control under the Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Dutch, and the process known as the Columbian Exchange: the exchange of people, plants, animals, and diseases that forever changed both the Old and New Worlds.

In the earliest era of contact and conquest, the Spanish dominated the New World. Their experiences largely defined early European knowledge of the Americas and its native inhabitants, the Indians, a group unknown to Europeans. In the fifty years after Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas in 1492, the Spanish expanded throughout the Caribbean, Mesoamerica, and the Andes, establishing the basis for a powerful hemispheric empire. Two of the main challenges the Spanish faced in establishing and administering their new empires were distance and time; the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean separating colony and mother country, and the long journey between the two, meant that communication was difficult. The distance between Europe and the Americas played a very important role in shaping colonial administration as well as patterns and methods of imperial control.

The first challenge to Spanish hegemony in the New World came with the Treaty of Tordesillas, which divided the known non-European world between Spain and Portugal. Part of Brazil fell within the Portuguese area of claim, leading to a growing struggle for control in the region between the powers. Later, France and the Netherlands entered the Americas. These two nations took a primarily economic interest in the American hemisphere, shaping their models of colonial administration largely around trade. The French spent much of their energy in conjunction with their political and economic capital building a fur trade in the North American frontier. The Dutch established their foothold in the Caribbean, engaging in both

legitimate trade and smuggling under the aegis of the Dutch West Indies Company. Politically, both France and the Netherlands wanted to weaken the Iberian hold on the Americas. The French actively contested Spanish power by trying to establish a colony in Spanish Florida. The Dutch were much less overt in their contestation of Iberian power; instead of establishing large, rival colonies, they concentrated on weakening the Spanish economically through piracy. However, the Dutch took on the Portuguese much more directly, conquering small but important lands in Brazil, wresting these areas from Portuguese control.

3.1.1 Learning Outcomes

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Analyze the motives of such explorers as Christopher Columbus, Pedro Cabral, Hernán Cortés, and Francisco Pizarro in venturing to Meso and South America and the motives of European monarchs in their efforts to reach the Indian Ocean by an all-water route.
- Explain the receptions extended to the Spanish explorers by the Indians of Mexico, Peru, and Brazil and the tactics employed by the Spanish as they attempted to conquer the Aztec and Inca Empires.
- Describe the complexities of the encounter of the Old World and the New, including the exchange of crops, animals, and diseases, as well as the experiences of the conquistadores and Native American as they interacted.
- Explain the dimensions of the Native American Holocaust and Transculturation.
- Discuss the impact of the Columbian Exchange on both the Old and New Worlds.

3.2 THE IMPACT OF “DISCOVERY”: THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

Most historians in the twenty-first century insist that the merits of Columbus and his experience must be measured in terms of fifteenth and sixteenth century standards and values, and not in terms of those of the twenty-first century. Columbus was a product of the crusading zeal of the Renaissance period, a religious man, whose accomplishments were remarkable. He sailed west and though he did not make it to the East Indies, he did encounter continents previously unknown to the Europeans. The subsequent crop and animal exchange revolutionized the lifestyle of Europeans, Asians, and Africans. Historians refer to this process as the “Columbian Exchange.” The Exchange introduced (or in the case of the horse, reintroduced) into the New World such previously unknown commodities as cattle, horses, sugar, tea, and coffee, while such products as tobacco, potatoes, chocolate, corn, and tomatoes made their way from the New World into the Old World. Not all exchanges were beneficial, of course; European diseases such as smallpox and influenza, to which the Native Americans had no resistance, were responsible for the significant depopulation of the New World.

Because of such crops as the potato, the sweet potato, and maize, however, Europeans and later the East Asians were able to vary their diets and participate in the technological revolution that would begin within 200 years of Columbus’s voyage.

The biological exchange following the voyages of Columbus was even more extensive than originally thought. Europeans discovered llamas, alpacas, iguana, flying squirrels, catfish, rattlesnakes, bison, cougars, armadillos, opossums, sloths, anacondas, electric eels, vampire bats, toucans, condors, and hummingbirds in the Americas. Europeans introduced goats and crops such as snap, kidney, and lima beans, barley, oats, wine grapes, melons, coffee, olives, bananas, and more to the New World.

3.2.1 From the New World to the Old: The Exchange of Crops

Corn (or maize) is a New World crop, which was unknown in the Old World before Columbus’s voyage in 1492. Following his four voyages, corn quickly became a staple crop in Europe. By 1630, the Spanish took over commercial production of corn, overshadowing the ancient use of maize for subsistence in Mesoamerica. Corn also became an important crop in China, whose population was the world’s largest in the early modern period. China lacked flat lands on which to grow crops, and corn was a hearty crop which grew in many locations that would otherwise be unable to be cultivated.

Today corn is produced in most countries of the world and is the third-most planted field crop (after wheat and rice).

Both the white and the sweet potato were New World crops that were unknown in the Old World before Columbus. The white potato originated in South America in the Andes Mountains where the natives developed over 200 varieties and pioneered the freeze-dried potato, or *chuño*, which can be stored for up to four years. Incan units of time were based on how long it took for a potato to cook to various consistencies. Potatoes were even used to divine the truth and predict weather. It became a staple crop in Europe after Columbus and was brought to North America by the Scots-Irish immigrants in the 1700s. The white potato is also known as the “Irish” potato as it provided the basic food supply of the Irish in the early modern period. The potato is a good source of many nutrients. When the Irish potato famine hit in the nineteenth century, many Irish immigrated to the Americas.

The sweet potato became an important crop in Europe as well as Asia. Because China has little flat land for cultivation, long ago its people learned to terrace its mountainous areas in order to create more arable land. During the Ming (1398-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties, China became the most populous nation on Earth. The sweet potato grew easily in many different climates and settings, and the Chinese learned to harvest it in the early modern period to supplement the rice supply and to compensate for the lack of flat lands on which to create rice paddies.

Tobacco was a New World crop, first discovered in 1492 on San Salvador when the Arawak gave Columbus and his men fruit and some pungent dried leaves. Columbus ate the fruit but threw away the leaves. Later, Rodrigo de Jerez witnessed natives in Cuba smoking tobacco in pipes for ceremonial purposes and as a symbol of good will.

By 1565, tobacco had spread throughout Europe. It became popular in England after it was introduced by Sir Walter Raleigh, explorer and national figure. By 1580, tobacco usage had spread from Spain to Turkey, and from there to Russia, France, England, and the rest of Asia. In 1614, the Spanish mandated that tobacco from the New World be sent to Seville, which became the world center for the production of cigars. In the same year, King James I of England created a royal monopoly on tobacco imports, though at the same time calling it “that noxious weed” and warning of its adverse effects.

Peppers have been found in prehistoric remains in Peru, where the Incas established their empire. They were grown in Central and South America. Spanish explorers first carried pepper seeds to Spain in 1493, and the plants then spread throughout Europe. Peppers are now cultivated in the tropical regions of Asia and in the Americas near the equator.

Tomatoes originated in the coastal highlands of western South America and were later cultivated by the Maya in Mesoamerica. The Spanish took them to Europe, where at first the Europeans believed them to be poisonous because of the pungent odor of their leaves. The *Physalis pubescens*, or husk tomato, was called *tomatl* by the natives, whereas the early common tomato was the *xitomatl*. The Spaniards called both fruits tomatoes. The use of tomatoes in sauces became known as “Spanish” cuisine. American tomatoes gradually made their way into the cuisine of Portugal, North Africa, and Italy, as well as the Germanic and Slavic regions held by the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs. By the late seventeenth century, tomatoes were included in southern Italian dishes, where they were known as also *poma d’oro*. Raw and cooked tomatoes were eaten in the Caribbean, Philippines, and southeastern Asia.

The peanut plant probably originated in Brazil or Peru. Inca graves often contain jars filled with peanuts to provide food for the dead in the afterlife. When the Spanish arrived in the New World, peanuts were grown as far north as Mexico. The explorers took peanuts back to Spain, where they are still grown. From Spain, traders and explorers took peanuts to Africa and Asia. Africans believed the plant possessed a soul, and they brought peanuts to the southern part of North America when they were brought there as slaves. The word “goober” comes from the Congo name for peanuts, *nguba*.

The wonderful commodity we know as chocolate is a product of the cacao tree. This tree requires the warm, moist climate which is found only within fifteen or twenty degrees of the equator. The first written records of chocolate date to the sixteenth century, but this product of cacao trees was likely harvested as long as three or four thousand years ago. This product consists of pods containing a pulpy mass, inside of which are seeds. The cacao bean is a brown kernel inside the seed.

The Olmec used cacao beans as early as 400 BCE; later the Mayans, Aztecs, and Toltecs also cultivated the crop. Eventually, the Indians learned how to make a drink from grinding the beans into a paste, thinning it with water, and adding sweeteners such as honey. They called the drink *xocolatl* (pronounced shoco-latl). The Aztecs used cacao beans as currency, and in 1502, Columbus returned from one of his expeditions with a bag full of cacao beans as a sample of the coins being used in the New World. In 1519, Cortés observed the Aztec Emperor Montezuma and his court drinking chocolate. In 1606, Italians reached the West Indies and returned with the secret of this splendid potion. The drink became popular in Europe, and in 1657, the first chocolate house opened in London.

The Exchange of Diseases

Although the origin of syphilis has been widely debated and its exact origin is unknown, Europeans like Bartolomé de las Casas, who visited the Americas in the early sixteenth century, wrote that the disease was well known among the natives there. Skeletal remains of Native Americans from this period and earlier suggest that here, in contrast to other regions of the world, the disease had a congenital form. Skeletons show “Hutchinson’s Teeth”, which are associated with the congenital form of the disease. They also show lesions on the skull and other parts of the skeleton, a feature associated with the late stages of the disease.

A second explanation which has received a good deal of support in the twenty-first century is that syphilis existed in the Old World prior to the voyages of Columbus, but that it was unrecognized until it became common and widely spread in the years following the discovery of the New World.

The eighteenth century writer Voltaire called syphilis the “first fruits the Spanish brought from the New World.” The disease was first described in Europe after Charles VIII of France marched his troops to Italy in 1494; when his men returned to France, they brought the disease with them and from there it spread to Germany, Switzerland, Greece, and other regions. When Vasco da Gama sailed around the tip of Africa in 1498, he carried the disease to India. In the 1500s, it reached China; in 1520 it reached Japan, where fifty percent of the population in Edo (modern Tokyo) was infected within one hundred years. Hernán Cortés contracted the disease in Haiti as he made his way to Mesoamerica. So widespread was the disease in the sixteenth century, it was called the “Great Pox” or, in a reflection of politics associated with the development of nation states, the disease was called the “French Pox,” the “Italian Pox,” or whatever name reflected the antagonisms of the time.

The Europeans brought smallpox, influenza, measles, and typhus to the New World, devastating the Native American population. Although Europeans had resistance to these diseases, the Native Americans did not. In Europe, measles was a minor irritant; in the New World, it killed countless natives. In the twenty-five years after Columbus landed on Hispaniola, the population there dropped from 5,000,000 to 500.

Some scholars estimate that between fifty to ninety percent of the Native American population died in the wake of the Spanish voyages. If these percentages are correct, they would represent an epidemic of monumental proportions to which there are no comparisons. For example, during the fourteenth century, the Black Death ravaged Europe, killing about fourteen million people, or between thirty to fifty percent of the population. By contrast, in Mexico alone, eight million people died from the diseases

brought by the Spanish; there is really no accurate count as to how many other natives died in other regions of the Americas. The impact of smallpox on the native population continued for many centuries after Columbus. During the westward expansion of the United States, pioneers and the army often gave Native Americans blankets laced with smallpox germs in order to more quickly “civilize” the West.

The Exchange of Animals

Fossil evidence shows that turkeys were in the Americas ten million years ago. Wild turkeys are originally native to North and Central America. Mesoamericans domesticated the turkey, and the Spanish took it to Europe. By 1524 the turkey reached England, and by 1558, it was popular at banquets in England and in other parts of Europe. Ironically, English settlers brought the domesticated turkey back to North America and interbred it with native wild turkeys. In 1579, the English explorer Martin Frobisher celebrated the first formal Thanksgiving in the Americas with a ceremony in Newfoundland to give thanks for surviving the long journey. The pilgrims who settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1621 celebrated their first harvest in the New World by eating wild turkey.

Although the horse very likely originated in the Americas, it migrated to Asia over the Bering Strait land bridge and became extinct in the Americas after prehistoric times. The horse was completely unknown to the Native Americans prior to the Spanish conquest. In 1519, Hernán Cortés wrote: “Next to God, We Owe Our Victory to Our Horses.” Cortés had brought only sixteen horses, but because the Aztecs fought primarily on foot, the Spaniards had a decided advantage. After their victory over the Aztecs, the Spanish brought more horses. In 1519, Coronado had 150 horses when he went to North America, and de Soto had 237 horses in 1539. By 1547, Antonio de Mendoza, the first governor of New Spain (Mexico), owned over 1,500 horses. The Spanish forbade Native Americans to ride horses without permission.

Cattle were unknown in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans. The Vikings brought European cattle to the Americas in 1000 CE. When their colony disappeared, so did their cattle. Columbus brought cattle to Hispaniola in 1493. In 1519, Cortés brought cattle to Central America. These cattle sported very long horns, hence the term “longhorns.” Spanish missionaries brought longhorns to Texas, New Mexico, and California; the breed also thrived in South America, especially near modern Brazil and Argentina. The Jamestown colony got its first cattle from England in 1611, and other European powers later brought cattle to their colonies. As the westward expansion began in the nineteenth century, the eastern cattle

supplanted the longhorn, as they were better for meat and proved to be hardy in difficult weather. Today, there are few longhorns in North America.

Pigs were unknown in the Americas before Hernán do de Soto brought thirteen of these animals to the Florida mainland. Columbus brought red pigs to the Americas on his second voyage. They were also brought into the United States from the Guinea coast of Africa on early slave-trading vessels. Today, the state of Kansas alone produces enough pigs every year to feed ten million people.

Sheep were first introduced in the southwestern United States by Cortés in 1519 to supply wool for his soldiers. Navajo sheep are descended from the multi-colored sheep from the Spanish. During the westward expansion of the nineteenth century, there would be great conflict between cattle and sheep owners over grazing land.

3.2.2 From the Columbian Exchange to Transculturation

The economic and cultural exchange in the wake of Columbus's voyages brought about a profound shift in the world view of Europeans; the trading empires that resulted from the discovery of the Americas created a new, global economy in which many different peoples interacted. The economic exchange had a profound effect on society and politics and the Americas were a microcosm of these changes.

Silver from the mines in the Americas flooded the European markets. From 1503-1650, the Spanish brought 6 million kilograms of silver and 185,000 kilograms of gold into Seville. Although the influx of New World silver has often been blamed for the rampant inflation which hit Spain and later Europe in the sixteenth century, prices had already risen sharply before 1565, while silver imports did not reach their peak until 1580-1620. However, Phillip II of Spain paid his armies and foreign debts with New World silver and transmitted the rising prices and inflation in Spain to the rest of Europe. This surge in prices is known as the Price Revolution. In Saxony in 1517, the year Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses, prices had risen by one hundred percent over what they were in 1492, the year of Columbus's first voyage.

The Voyages of Exploration also created a global economy through sea trade. The Portuguese reached India and then went on to Japan and China. They brought back spices to Lisbon and often paid for these goods with textiles from India along with gold and ivory from East Africa. From the Portuguese outpost at Macao, they took Chinese silk to the Philippines and Japan, where they traded silk for Spanish silver. Spanish silver from the New World had a dramatic effect on the Chinese economy; the Single Whip

Reform united the taxation system of China through a single tax payable in silver.

The Portuguese also brought horses to India from Mesopotamia and copper from Arabia, and carried hawks and peacocks from India to China and Japan. The Portuguese traded in African slaves; African slave labor produced the sugar on their plantations in Brazil, which produced the bulk of Europe's sugar supply in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Portuguese became the language of trade in East Africa and Asia. The legacy of the Portuguese trading empire continued until the late twentieth century.

The Spanish and Dutch also established large maritime empires during the Age of Exploration. Miguel López de Legazpi established Spanish control over the Philippine Islands, linking Spanish trade in the Americas with trade in the East. Similarly, the Dutch established a trading empire based on spices, and in 1599, a Dutch fleet brought over 600,000 pounds of pepper and other spices to Amsterdam.

The interaction among Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans in the sixteenth century illustrated the clash of cultures that arose as European motives were at odds with the ethos and lifestyle of the indigenous civilizations of the Americas. This process, transculturation, occurred especially in the cities, where the different ethnicities lived in closer proximity than in the provinces, and where African slaves were allowed greater freedom of movement and association. Transculturation was also obvious on the plantations of Brazil and the larger estates, known as *haciendas*, in Spanish America; on both, African slaves and indigenous peoples worked side by side with *mestizos*, who were usually “sharecroppers.”

New ethnicities appeared: the *mestizos* were created by intermarriage between Europeans and Indians; *mulattoes* were the offspring of whites and Africans. Similarly, religion reflected the fact that traditional Indian religions adapted and adopted elements of Catholicism. An example of this can be found in the patron saint of Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe. The figure was placed on a site sacred to Aztec religion, and at times, her face is depicted as dark, at other times, light. The Nahuatl-speaking Mexicans gave her the name of the Aztec earth goddess, Tonantzin. The same melding of religious traditions is evident in the tendency of Mexican crucifixion figures to be covered in blood, a bow to the Aztec belief that blood was needed to keep the sun burning and thus was a symbol of a life-giving force.¹

In looking at the story of the conquest and its impact on both conquistadors and the monarchs of Spain, it is interesting to compare the views of Philip II of Spain, writing in 1559, with those of Lope de Aguirre, a Spanish adventurer in Peru, just two years later. Philip II's thoughts turned entirely to the wealth that the Indies had brought to the Spanish monarchy (and

indeed this wealth helped fund the famous Spanish Armada), while the conquistador chided the king for his indifference to the plight of those who had done so much to secure this wealth. Philip explained:

[F]rom New Spain are obtained gold and silver, cochineal [little insects like flies], from which crimson dye is made, leather, cotton, sugar and other things; but from Peru nothing is obtained except minerals. The fifth part of all that is produced goes to the king, but since the gold and silver is brought to Spain and he has a tenth part of that which goes to the mint and is refined and coined, he eventually gets one-fourth of the whole sum.²

He was also aware that the supply of precious metals would not last forever because “great quantities of gold and silver are no longer found upon the surface of the earth, as they have been in past years; and to penetrate into the bowels of the earth requires greater effort.”³ The effort would not come from the Crown, of course.

A very different picture is painted by Lope de Aguirre, who actually scolded the King by saying,

Look here, King of Spain! Do not be cruel and ungrateful to your vassals, because while your father and you stayed in Spain without the slightest bother, your vassals, at the price of their blood and fortune, have given you all the kingdoms and holding you have in these parts. Beware, King and lord, that you cannot take, under the title of legitimate king, any benefit from this land where you risked nothing, without first giving due gratification to those who have labored and sweated in it.⁴

These two writings came in the mid-sixteenth century, just a few decades after the conquest of the Aztec Empire and not long after the fall of the Incas to Pizarro. Great wealth had come to the Spanish monarchy, great suffering to those who actually went to or already lived in the New World.

3.2.3 Before You Move On...

Key Concepts

The significance of the exchange and sharing of cultures that resulted from the discovery of the Americas and their colonization by the Spanish and Portuguese can hardly be overstated. A profound economic revolution shook both hemispheres as the influx of crops, diseases, animals, and metals to the Old World changed patterns of trade, the medium of exchange, and ideas about the use and distribution of wealth.

Similarly, traditional ideas about the structure and inhabitants of the world were put aside as Europeans and Indians encountered and ultimately learned from each other. Ethnicities were intertwined as Europeans, Africans, Indians, and their children created a complicated hierarchy of race and class in the colonies. The world had been turned upside down, perhaps for the first, if not for the last, time.

Test Yourself

1. Which of the following animals did **not** originate in the Old World of Europe, Africa, or Asia?
 - a. Llamas
 - b. Cattle
 - c. Sheep
 - d. Pigs
2. Which of the following crops originated in the New World?
 - a. Oats
 - b. Peanuts
 - c. Barley
 - d. Coffee
3. What crop was so controversial that monarchs in Europe and China attempted to ban its use?
 - a. Tobacco
 - b. Rice
 - c. Potato
 - d. Wheat
4. Which of the following crops did **not** originate in the New World?
 - a. Tobacco
 - b. Maize
 - c. Potato
 - d. Wheat

5. Which of the following European diseases was responsible for the greatest number of Amerindian deaths in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries?
- a. Measles
 - b. Influenza
 - c. Bubonic Plague
 - d. Smallpox

[Click here to see answers](#)

3.3 THE IBERIAN COUNTRIES IN THE NEW WORLD

The countries of the Iberian Peninsula in Western Europe, Spain, and Portugal were the first to arrive and establish settlements in the New World. Being established almost a century before the permanent English settlement at Jamestown in 1607, the Iberian colonies were not originally intended to be permanent; rather, the explorers and conquistadors came to the Americas as the conquistador Hernán Cortés said, “for gold and glory” and not to “work the fields like a peasant.”⁵ Portugal, long an insignificant player in world affairs, was the first European country to sponsor voyages of exploration along the coast of Africa. In 1488, four years before the first voyage of Christopher Columbus, the Portuguese sailor Bartholomew Diaz rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of the African continent. The Portuguese, like the Spanish, sought an all-water route to the Indian Ocean in order to trade directly with India, China, the East Indies, and Japan. The purpose of Columbus’s voyages, the first of which came in 1492, was similar to that of the Portuguese; he sought a route that would allow Spain to trade directly with the countries bordering the Indian and Western Pacific Oceans. The Spanish in 1492, and the Portuguese eight years later, were the first European countries to encounter the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The Spanish dominated the exploration, conquest, and colonization of the Americas in the sixteenth century as Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztec Empire, 1519-1521, and Francisco Pizarro the Inca Empire a decade later.

3.3.1 Early Relations in the Caribbean, Mesoamerica, and Peru

When Christopher Columbus sailed west in 1492, he had no idea that he would encounter a world and a people never before seen by Europeans. He had no expectations about the people who actually swam out to meet

his ships; he thought, after all, that he had reached the shores of the East Indies. Columbus kept a journal of his travels in which he recorded his first impressions of the peoples of the Caribbean Islands. According to this journal, the natives who greeted the three caravels,

were very friendly to us, and [we] perceived that they could be much more easily converted to our holy faith by gentle means than by force. I presented them with some red caps, and strings of beads to wear upon the neck, and many other trifles of small value, wherewith they were much delighted, and became wonderfully attached to us. Afterwards they came swimming to the boats, bringing parrots, balls of cotton thread, javelins, and many other things which they exchanged for articles...which trade was carried on with the utmost good will. But they seemed on the whole to me, to be a very poor people.⁶

Columbus went on to remark that the people were “mostly naked” even the women, though he admitted that he had seen only one woman. The natives appeared to have few weapons and, in fact, lived a very simple life. Not only had they no weapons, they apparently had not seen any, as Columbus remarked that when he “showed them swords...they grasped by the blades, and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron, their javelins being without it, and nothing more than sticks, though some have fish-bones or other things at the ends.”⁷ The experience of the Spaniards on the other islands in the Caribbean was similar. In his entry of October 13, 1492, Columbus recalled that “The natives are an inoffensive people, and so desirous to possess anything they saw with us, that they kept swimming off to the ships with whatever they could find.”⁸

The experience of Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and his men in North America mirrored the experiences of his countrymen in Meso- and South America. Writing in 1542, he praised the hospitality of the Indians of Florida:

AS THE SUN ROSE next morning, the Indians appeared as they promised, bringing an abundance of fish and of certain roots which taste like nuts, some bigger than walnuts, some smaller, mostly grubbed from the water with great labor.

That evening they came again with more fish and roots and brought their women and children to look at us. They thought themselves rich with the little bells and beads we gave them, and they repeated their visits on other days.⁹

Not surprisingly, Bartholomew de las Casas, an outspoken proponent of fair treatment of the Indians, echoed the comments of Columbus and Cabeza de Vaca in describing his early encounters on the Caribbean islands: “On one occasion they came out ten leagues from a great settlement to meet

us, bringing provisions and gifts, and when we met them they gave us a great quantity of fish and bread and other victuals.”¹⁰

Hernán Cortés, who would ultimately kidnap Moctezuma II, the emperor of the Aztec Empire, and raze the capital city of Tenochtitlan, was warmly greeted by the Mexica ruler. According to Cortés, Moctezuma remarked: “We believe that the King of Spain is our natural lord...”¹¹ In his second letter to Charles V, Cortés remarked that the people of the Aztec Empire appeared willing to accept Christianity as the true religion, saying, “if I would instruct them in these matters, and make them understand the true faith, they would follow my directions, as being for the best.”¹² Furthermore, the natives were evidently passive when Cortés “purified” the temples by “removing the old idols and replacing them with symbols of Christianity.” He forbade the natives to continue the practice of human sacrifice to Huitzilopochtli, a primary god, and was somewhat surprised when they complied. He wrote: “[D]uring the whole period of my abode in that city, they were never seen to kill or sacrifice a human being.”¹³

An Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico describes the first encounter of Cortés and Moctezuma this way:

Then he [Moctezuma] stood up to welcome Cortés; he came forward, bowed his head low and addressed him in these words: “Our lord, you are weary. The journey has tired you, but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne, to sit under its canopy.”

According to this same account, on another occasion Moctezuma remarked: “The kings who have gone before, your representatives, guarded [the Empire] and preserved it for your coming.”¹⁴

Cortés Conquers the Aztec Empire

Hernán Cortés landed on the coast at Veracruz on Good Friday, April 22, 1519; just over two years later, on August 13, 1521, the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan surrendered to him. The events that took place during these two short years were documented in a number of chronicles, of which the best known are the letters Cortés wrote to King Charles I of Spain, who was also Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, and the *True History of the Conquest of Mexico* by Bernal Díaz del Castillo. Until recently these two works, along with a few others also written by Spaniards, were almost the only basis on which historians have judged the conquest of one of the greatest civilizations in pre-Columbian America. These documents tell the story only from the point of view of the Spanish, but now another source has been added to the mix. *Broken Spears: An Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, draws from indigenous accounts to present a different picture of the Spanish and their relations with the Indians.

It was not surprising that the Aztec Empire would fall to the Spanish, despite the fact that the Spanish soldiers under Cortés numbered 600 and were faced by an Aztec army of thousands. One reason for the Spanish success was due to their military tactics and weaponry. The Mexica people, of whom Moctezuma was the head, and their allies fought with bows and arrows and spears, while the Spanish were protected by steel armor, wielded steel swords, and had the advantage of attacking on horseback. In addition, the Spanish found unexpected allies in the tribes that were previously forced to pay tribute to the Aztec Empire. At least one group, the Totonacs, greeted the Spanish as liberators. No small part of Spanish success came from the inadvertent introduction of smallpox into Tenochtitlan resulting in the deaths of thousands in the city in 1521.



Figure 3.1 Moctezuma II and Hernán Cortés | Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador, is famous for his conquest of the Aztecs of Mexico and the execution of the emperor Moctezuma II.

Author: Unknown
Source: Library of Congress

For many decades, historians argued that another factor could be found in Aztec religious beliefs that Quetzalcoatl, a white-skinned god, would, at an undisclosed time, arrive in the Empire.¹⁵ Indeed, according to Cortés, when Moctezuma first encountered the conquistador, he remarked, “We have always held that those who are descended from [Quetzalcoatl] would come and conquer this land and take us as his vassals.”¹⁶ Many observers at the time remarked that Mesoamerican natives, like those of the Caribbean Islands, believed the white men to be gods. Bernal Díaz offered an explanation about the origin of this belief when he commented in his *True History of the Conquest of Spain*, “The Indians thought the rider and the horse were the same body, as they had never seen a horse.”¹⁷

However, over the last twenty years, Latin American historians have largely discredited this “white god” theory. The myth appears to have originated about forty years after the conquest in documents such as the Florentine Codex, an Aztec history produced by young Aztec men in Spanish schools. In these documents, the Spanish are referred to as *teotls*, a word that can mean either god or demon in Nahuatl, the spoken language of the Mexica.¹⁸

In 1519, Hernán Cortés entered the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan, awed by its splendor. It was, he remarked, “so big and so remarkable [as

to be]...almost unbelievable, for the city is much larger than Granada and very much stronger...with many more people than Granada had when it was taken...[It] is as large as Seville or Cordova.”¹⁹ Cortés was aided in his communication with Moctezuma and his nobility by a slave presented to him by the natives of Tabasco in 1519, La Malinche, who was fluent in the Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztecs.

Despite their advantages, the Spanish did not defeat the Aztec coalition outright; rather they experienced a resounding defeat at the hands of the Indians in 1520 and were forced to flee the capital city. Those who were captured by the Aztecs were sacrificed at the pyramid of Huitzilopochtli; this occurred on the night of June 30-July 1, 1520, called *La Noche Triste* (The Sad Night) by the Spaniards.

But this defeat was only a temporary setback for the Spanish, who received aid from an unexpected source: in 1521, smallpox struck Tenochtitlan. Miguel León-Portilla includes an Aztec account in which a native bemoaned the condition of the city’s inhabitants: “We were covered with agonizing sores from head to foot. The illness was so dreadful that no one could walk or move.”²⁰ The disease had been introduced into the city by a Spanish slave, left behind when the Europeans retreated. Those struck by the disease were too weak to move, and even if they survived, were in no condition to cultivate food. The inhabitants of the city were literally starving to death.

On August 21, 1521, the Spanish re-entered the city, overwhelmed its last defenses, declared victory, and accepted the surrender of the remaining native warriors. The conditions they encountered were horrifying. Bernal Díaz wrote some years later that the Spaniards “...found the houses full of corpses, and some poor Mexicans still in [the houses] who could not move away...The city looked as though it had been ploughed up. The roots of



Figure 3.2 Ritual Sacrifice | Ritual sacrifice was widely practiced by the Indians of Mesoamerica. According to Spanish accounts, the Aztecs ripped out the hearts of war captives in an effort to appease such gods as Huitzilopochtli. Such sacrifice took place on La Noche Triste, according to Spanish sources.

Author: Codex Magliabechiano, artist unknown
Source: Library of Congress

any edible greenery had been dug out, boiled and eaten, and they had even cooked the bark of some of the trees.”²¹

After the defeat of the Aztecs, Cortés proceeded to execute Moctezuma, level Tenochtitlan, and begin to build what is now Mexico City. So thorough was the destruction of the city that few Aztec ruins remain today.

The wanton destruction of Tenochtitlan symbolized the Spanish attitude toward the Americas,

which were for conquest, ownership, and exploitation. The contemporary accounts of Cortés, Bernal Díaz, and the Spanish historian Francisco López de Gómara reflected the attitude of the Crown: the Americas were a new Spanish Empire and the natives, Spanish vassals.

The Spanish and the Incas of Peru

The first Spanish to meet the Incas of Peru were impressed by their social and economic system, which some historians describe as an early form of socialism. Pedro de Cieza de León, Spanish conquistador and chronicler of Peru, commented on the Inca practice of tribute and crop sharing: “As this kingdom was so vast, in each of the many provinces there were storehouses that were filled during years of plenty and opened in time of need.” He went on to explain:

No one [was tolerated] who was lazy or tried to live by the work of others; everyone had to work. Thus on certain days each lord went to his lands and took the plow in hand and cultivated the earth, and did other things. Even the Incas [the rulers] themselves did this to set an example. And under their system there was none [who did not work] in all the kingdom, for, if he had his health, he worked and lacked for nothing; and if he was ill, he received what he needed from the storehouses.

The economic system was both well organized and egalitarian; each village was required to contribute grain to support the whole and “no rich man could deck himself out in more finery than the poor, or wear different clothing, except the rulers and the headmen, who, to maintain their dignity, were allowed great freedom and privilege.”²² Unlike the case in Mexico and the Caribbean, there was no honeymoon period in the relations between Francisco Pizarro, who eventually conquered the Inca Empire, and the natives of Peru; the relationship between the Spanish and Incas was antagonistic from the outset.²³

Francisco Pizarro Conquers the Inca Empire

Long before the Inca enterprise was undertaken by Francisco Pizarro and his men, word had come to the Spanish in Mesoamerica about the wealth and riches of cultures in the South. In 1529, Francisco Pizarro, who had already undertaken two unsuccessful expeditions to South America in 1524 and 1526, was appointed governor of Peru by Charles V in an agreement known as the *Capitulación de Toledo*. Pizarro arrived in Peru in 1532 with 168 men, sixty-two of whom were horse soldiers. Hernán do de Soto was sent as an envoy from Pizarro to Atahualpa, the Inca emperor, to assure him that the Spanish meant no harm and came in friendship and with the



Figure 3.3 Francisco Pizarro | Francisco Pizarro, using trickery and deceit, conquered the Incas of Peru in 1532 and executed the Inca emperor, Atahualpa.

Author: D.M. Kelsey

Source: *Columbus and the New World Heroes of Discovery and Conquest*

of the Inca Empire, and in 1535, with his control of Peru consolidated, he established a new capital city now known as Lima. He was assassinated in 1541 by the son of a long-time associate Diego de Almagro. He was laid to rest in the Lima Cathedral.

The Portuguese in Brazil

The first Portuguese to reach the Americas were the men accompanying Pedro Cabral, who, when he sailed from Portugal in 1500, was headed to India. He and his ships were blown off course and ended up on the shores of Brazil, which he claimed for the King of Portugal, Manuel I. Cabral named the new land “The Island of the True Cross”, but remained in Brazil only ten days before heading on to India. Cabral’s claim of Brazil on behalf of the Portuguese Crown was facilitated by the *Treaty of Tordesillas* created by Pope Alexander VI in 1494 to settle competing claims to Atlantic discoveries. An imaginary line was drawn through the Americas; land west of the line went to Spain and east of the line to Portugal.

Although there were some commonalities between the Spanish experience in Mexico and Peru, and the Portuguese experience in Brazil, in the latter

best of intentions. Atahualpa agreed to meet Pizarro and his forces the following day at Cajamarca in the highlands of Peru.

On November 16, 1532, when Atahualpa and his 7,000-man, unarmed escort arrived, the Spanish, who were positioned around the town square, opened fire and 2,000 Inca were killed outright. Pizarro then rounded up and killed the Inca nobles. The Spaniards on horses rode through the carnage, swinging steel swords, and decapitating the bodies. Atahualpa was taken prisoner, and though the Incas came to Pizarro with mounds of gold for his ransom (which Pizarro gleefully accepted), Pizarro had Atahualpa executed, which was similar to the approach Cortés practiced in Mexico.

Once the conquest was complete, Pizarro appointed a nominal ruler

there were no wealthy, urbanized cultures like Tenochtitlan and the Inca cities of Cuzco and Quito. Rather, many of the 2.4 million Brazilian natives were either nomadic or semi-sedentary. According to some historians, the initial contacts were “generally peaceful.” However, others point out that when the Portuguese came in contact with the forest peoples of the interior, like the Tupi, the Portuguese “attacked and enslaved each tribal group of several hundreds, one by one, in bloody skirmishes” because the only way to subdue the natives was to kill them all.²⁴

After the Brazilian natives were subdued, sugar plantations sprang up along the coast of Brazil, but their numbers were not significant. However, while the Portuguese presence in Brazil remained small, the Spanish settled in large numbers in Mexico and Peru, which remained the wealthiest and most-populous areas in the New World for 300 years.²⁵

3.3.2 Before You Move On...

Key Concepts

Spain and Portugal were the first countries in the new wave of exploration of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to arrive and establish settlements in the New World. Coming almost a century before the first permanent English settlement at Jamestown in 1607, the colonies of the Iberian countries were not originally intended to be permanent. Eventually, these settlements did in fact become permanent and, with the success in mining gold and silver, their European populations increased in size. But in the course of establishing control, the Spanish had to contend with two well-established New World empires: the Aztec Empire in Mesoamerica and the Inca Empire in Peru. The conquest of the Aztecs established patterns of conquest that were later utilized in the defeat of the Incas. Recruiting native allies and kidnapping local leaders allowed the Spanish to control power from within as they focused their efforts on the strongest group in the area, rather than fighting multiple wars against many groups. In addition, the Spanish inadvertently introduced European diseases like smallpox, which greatly weakened local groups.

Test Yourself

- Which of the follow was well known for his criticism of the Europeans’ treatment of the Indians of Meso- and South America?
 - Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca
 - Hernán Cortés
 - Bartholomew de las Casas
 - Pedro Cabral

2. The *Treaty of Tordesillas*
 - a. Divided the New World between the Spanish and the Portuguese.
 - b. Specified that the *encomienda* system should be disbanded.
 - c. Allowed the use of Incas in the mines of Peru.
 - d. Formally recognized the conquest of the Aztec Empire by Cortés and his soldiers.

3. The majority of the natives killed in the exploration period were slaughtered by the Europeans who possessed superior weapons.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. The first explorer to reach Brazil and claim it for the throne of Portugal was:
 - a. Christopher Columbus
 - b. Pedro Cabral
 - c. Ferdinand Magellan
 - d. Jacques Cartier

5. Recruiting native allies played an important role in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec.
 - a. True
 - b. False

6. The myth of Quetzalcoatl relies on sources that are contemporaneous with the conquest of the Aztec.
 - a. True
 - b. False

[Click here to see answers](#)

3.4 CONTROL: THE IBERIAN NATIONS MANAGE THEIR NEW WORLD TERRITORIES

Three decades after Columbus's "discovery" of the New World, the Spanish Crown began centralizing its control of the new territories. In 1524, the Council of the Indies was created, which oversaw developments in New

Spain until the close of the colonial period. The Council was located in the mother country.²⁶

New Spain was divided into four viceroyalties: New Spain (Mexico, Central America, and California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas), whose capital was Mexico City; Peru (Peru, Chile, Bolivia, and Ecuador), whose capital city was Lima; New Granada (Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and later Ecuador), whose capital city was Bogota; and La Plata (Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay) whose capital was Buenos Aires.

Each viceroyalty was overseen by a viceroy, who exercised ultimate power over his viceroyalty in a manner reminiscent of a European monarch. The viceroy was also in charge of the *Audiencia*, a twelve to fifteen judge advisory council and court of law. At the end of each term, the viceroy was subjected to a *Residencia*, or a judicial review of his term in office. All appeals went directly to the Council of the Indies.

The provinces were under the control of royal officials, the *corregidores* (governors whose territory was known as a *corregimiento*), the *captains general* (whose provinces were known as *captaincies general*), or *alcaldes mayores*, who held political and judicial power. The first governors of the provinces were the conquistadores themselves; this system did not last past the first decade. Most towns had a *cabildo* or town council, though these units did not represent democracy in the sense of the New England town meetings, as power was lodged in the hands of the royal officials. *Adelantados* were commanders of units of conquest or the governors of a frontier or newly-conquered province.²⁷

The economic systems of Spanish America were also strictly-controlled hierarchical and economic endeavors. Spanish holdings were divided into mining zones when gold and silver was discovered and subsequently became extremely important to the Spanish economy. The rule known as the *quinto* specified that one-fifth of all precious metals mined in the colonies was to go to the Spanish Crown. Similar restrictions were placed on trade when there were only two designated ports through which colonial trade could go.

Native laborers were provided through the *encomienda* system (called the *mita* in Portuguese areas), which was a grant from the King of Spain given to an individual mine or plantation (*hacienda*) owner for a specific number of natives to work in any capacity in which they were needed; the *encomenderos*, or owners, had total control over these workers. Ostensibly, the purpose was to protect the natives from enemy tribes and instruct them in Christian beliefs and practices. In reality, the *encomienda* system was hard to distinguish from chattel slavery. The *Repartiniento*, which granted land and/or Indians to settlers for a specified period of time, was a similar system.

3.4.1 The Portuguese Settlements

In Brazil, economic development centered on sugar rather than silver and gold; thus, the main money maker for the Crown of Portugal was taxes on sugar. As the Indians were subdued, increasing numbers of sugar plantations emerged along the Atlantic coast. Those Portuguese who were wealthy enough to own a sugar mill as well as a plantation, the *senhores de engenho* or “lords of the mill,” were at the apex of the social system. They oversaw production by the slaves and freemen who lived in and around the mill, which was the social center of any area.

Probably because the sugar taxes did not generate a large amount of revenue, the Portuguese Crown did not put forth an effort to create a similar highly-centralized system in New Spain until the mid-sixteenth century. Portuguese kings in the early sixteenth century, like John II in the fifteenth century, gave “captaincies,” or administrative units, to wealthy Portuguese who were willing to settle in the New World. Those who held captaincies were known as “proprietors” or *donatários*.

Most of the labor on the sugar plantations came from African and Indian slaves, though the latter were especially resistant to control by the Europeans. In fact, many of the captaincies failed in part because of the resistance of the Indians. Because of ongoing rebellions, the Portuguese king in 1549 created a royal governor, or captain general, for Brazil; the powers of the *donatários* were consequently limited. The captain general was an office similar to the viceroys in New Spain.

During the Iberian Union (1580-1640, a period when Portugal and Spain were ruled by a single dynasty), the Spanish created a *Conselho da Índia* (similar to the Spanish Council for the Indies) to regulate the Portuguese colonies. After Portugal regained its independence from Spain in 1640, this structure was maintained.

The local provinces were under the control of governors, who were appointed for three-year terms; their military and political power was absolute. Before assuming the position of governor, a candidate had to present his qualifications to the *Senado da Câmara*, or town council. Judicial affairs were conducted by the *Ouvidor* and *Juiz de Fora*, who, like the governors, were appointed to three-year terms. Seven officials made up the *Junta*, or council, which decided the policies of the individual captaincy. The *Junta* consisted of the governor, the judicial officials, an attorney general, the secretary of the treasury, and two ports officials.

Except for the sugar-holding areas along the northeast coast, most of the remainder of Brazil was sparsely settled through the sixteenth century. The Amazon was surrounded by rainforests, and the areas beyond the sugar coast were considered “dirt-poor cattle country.”²⁸ Despite the efforts of the

Jesuits to improve the treatment and conditions of the indigenous people, disease was rampant; the Indians, who had no resistance to smallpox and influenza, died in droves. By 1600, Africans, who had developed immunity to European diseases over centuries of interaction between the two continents, were replacing indigenous peoples as slaves on the sugar plantations.

3.4.2 The Indians in the Iberian Colonies

There was a good deal of mistreatment of the American natives by both the Spanish and the Portuguese. Because the Catholic Church followed the adventurers, it was inevitable that attention would be drawn to the plight of the “pobres Indios” (as Bartholomew de las Casas referred to them). De las Casas is perhaps the most famous of the reformers, though he came to the New World originally as an adventurer and received an *encomienda* from the Spanish Crown. By 1514, however, he had had a change of heart and became an advocate for the fair treatment of the natives. Mainly as the result of his activities, in 1537, Pope Alexander VI issued a dictate stressing that the indigenous people were just that—people—who were not inferior to any other group. In 1542, the Spanish Crown issued the *New Laws of the Indies for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians*, which limited and eventually ended the *encomienda* system.

Similarly, in Brazil, because the expanding plantation economy demanded a greater and greater supply of cheap labor, slave hunting became a lucrative profession. As the supply of coastal natives depleted, the *bandeirantes* (or “men of the banner”) pushed further west and south in search of new sources of labor. As was the case in New Spain, one of the voices that spoke out against the exploitation of the natives was that of a Jesuit, Father Joseph de Anchieta, who wrote:

The *bandeirantes* go into the interior and deceive these people [the Indians], inviting them to go to the coast, where they would live in villages as they did in their present lands... On arrival at the coast, [the Portuguese] would divide the Indians among themselves,



Figure 3.4 Bartholomew de las Casas | Bartholomew de las Casas, though originally a conquistador himself, became an ardent proponent of fair treatment of “los pobres Indios” (the poor Indians) and wrote widely on their behalf.

Author: Constantino Brumidi
Source: USCapitol Photostream (Flickr)

some taking the women, others their husbands and still others the children, and they sell them.²⁹

In 1549, as part of its effort to tighten control and to clarify relations with the American natives, the Portuguese Crown stipulated that military campaigns to “pacify” or subdue the natives would be accompanied by “evangelical campaigns of conversion.”³⁰ In the 1570s the Portuguese Crown released a series of law intended to define the legal status of Indians in its colonies. Indians could still be enslaved, but only as the result of a “just war or for practicing cannibalism.”³¹

3.4.3 Before You Move On...

Key Concepts

The years immediately following the conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires were a time of figuring things out and exploring options for the Spanish and Portuguese. They faced great challenges in ruling over colonies far from the mother country, and the time and distance involved in governance necessitated the establishment of institutions of rule and a colonial bureaucracy. Labor quickly became a defining need in the colonies, and many of the emerging policies and laws focused on the issue of the indigenous peoples. As the sixteenth century progressed, Portugal and Spain, now under one rule, began to officially address the status of the Indians and to recognize that the abuse of the earliest years must be rectified if peace were to be attainable in the Iberian colonies.

Test Yourself

1. The system that helped provide labor for the Spanish mines and sugar plantations was the:
 - a. *Quinto*
 - b. *Audiencia*
 - c. *Encomienda*
 - d. *Residencia*

2. The Brazilian economy was largely based on
 - a. Sugar
 - b. Coffee
 - c. Silver
 - d. Indigo

3. The _____ was part of the bureaucracy of Spanish rule and oversaw developments in New Spain until the close of the colonial period.
- Encomienda*
 - Mita*
 - Council of the Indies
 - Donatários*

[Click here to see answers](#)

3.5 ALTERNATE MODELS OF CONTROL: THE FRENCH AND DUTCH IN THE AMERICAS

Because Spain and Portugal were the first to establish colonies in the Americas, the patterns that they established served as the first models of colonization and control of American colonies. The biggest challenge that they faced in administering their colonial holdings were those of time and space. Communication between colony and mother country was difficult, and it took months for messages, orders, and news to travel across the Atlantic. The distance between Europe and the Americas played a very important role in shaping colonial administration along with patterns and methods of imperial control. The ways in which the Iberian powers politically and economically administered their colonial holdings were also a reflection of the relationship between mother country and colony. The American holdings were settlement colonies that would be shaped in the image of Spain and Portugal. Spaniards and Portuguese came from the mother country to populate the colonies; they desired to recreate their homeland in their new land, and so sought (sometimes unsuccessfully) to live in a Spanish or Portuguese manner. As a result, they set up a direct system of governance that exerted tight control of the colonies. The American colonies were to economically benefit the mother country; thus, colonial trade was also tightly controlled.

When other European powers became active in the colonization of the American hemisphere, political and economic models of control were similarly a result of time, distance, and the relationship between mother country and colony. The French and Dutch both provide very different models of control in the Americas than their Iberian counterparts. Both of these nations took a primarily economic interest in the American hemisphere; both shaped their models of colonial administration largely around trade. For the French, this meant engaging in the fur trade in the North American frontier in the Great Lakes region and later along the Mississippi River. The

Dutch established their foothold in the Caribbean, a move which proved to be very lucrative.

Politically, both France and the Netherlands wanted to weaken the Spanish (and to a lesser extent, the Portuguese) hold on the Americas. The French actively contested Spanish power by trying to establish a colony in Florida, a strategic area which would allow them to interrupt Spanish shipping lanes coming north out of the Caribbean. The Dutch were much less overt in their contestation of Iberian power; instead of establishing large, rival colonies that encroached on the Spanish, they instead concentrated on weakening their Spanish competitors through piracy. The Dutch took on the Portuguese more directly, conquering small but important lands in Brazil, wresting these areas from Portuguese control.

3.5.1 The French in the Americas: Canada and Florida

The French were most active in North America as participants in a thriving fur trade. However, French activity in the New World did not begin as successfully; the earliest French expeditions to North America, and particularly in Canada, were largely unsuccessful ventures. The first voyages, led by Jacques Cartier between 1534 and 1542, established contact with local peoples, including the Huron and Iroquois. They were eager to trade with Cartier; in fact, on Cartier's second voyage, the headman of the Iroquoian town of Stadacona tried to prevent Cartier from leaving so that his village, through control of Cartier, could by extension control and dominate the French-Indian trade. For the French, these early voyages established that the area contained no natural or human resources that proved to be valuable to them at the time. As a result, the French retreated from Canada and spent much of the next fifty years trying to establish themselves elsewhere in the Americas, most notably in Florida in 1564. Eventually, the French came back to Canada to participate in the developing trade in beaver pelts, and came to successfully dominate much of the interior trade.

The French Struggle to Control Florida

The French next turned their attention to the south and towards taking action to weaken the Spanish political hold on the Americas. In 1564, René Goulaine de Laudonnière led an expedition to [Florida](#), establishing Fort Caroline at the mouth of the St. John's River in modern Jacksonville. Florida was a strategic and valuable area for its proximity to the rich Spanish Caribbean. The French hoped to establish a successful settlement in Florida, and thus a stepping-off point to contest Spanish power in the Caribbean. A foothold in Florida could also provide the opportunity to weaken the Spanish Crown through piracy; the prevailing currents and winds of the Caribbean



Figure 3.5 Pedro Menéndez de Avilés | Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, founder of St. Augustine.

Artist: Francisco de Paula Martí
Source: Library of Congress

and Atlantic ensured Spanish shipping lanes, including the transport of the treasure fleets, traveled up along the Florida coast before venturing out across the Atlantic. The settlement at Fort Caroline was also a reflection of French concerns at home; religious tensions between Catholics and Huguenots (Protestants) had intensified. Many of the Huguenots had been cast out of France; some came to Fort Caroline to seek refuge.

The Spanish, hearing of the French incursion into Spanish territory, established their own colony slightly south of Fort Caroline at San Agustín (St. Augustine). The expedition was led by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, who later became *adelantado* (the governing official) of *la Florida*, which encompassed much of North America, from the Chesapeake Bay south to the tip of the mainland and west to modern-day New Mexico. Spanish attempts to establish a settlement in Florida had been ineffective in the past, but the St. Augustine settlement proved successful, in part because of the relationship the Spaniards cultivated with the Timucua Indians. As a result, St. Augustine is the oldest continuously-settled European settlement in the continental United States.

In September of 1565, Menéndez de Avilés led a force against the French settlement at Fort Caroline. The Spanish quickly overwhelmed the French forces, killing many of the men, but sparing most of the women and children. Twenty-five of the Frenchmen escaped, making their way along the Florida coast. The Spanish caught up to them about fifteen miles outside of St. Augustine, where Menéndez de Avilés ordered the men executed, securing Spanish dominance in Florida. The Catholic Spanish offered the Protestant Huguenots the chance to renounce their “apostate” faith and embrace Catholicism; their refusal was part of what sealed their fate. The massacre of the French settlers and soldiers marked the end of the French experiment in Florida and their attempts to undermine Spanish political control in the area.

Back to Canada—Control and the Fur Trade

Defeated in Florida, the French turned their efforts back to Canada at the turn of the century. In 1603, Samuel de Champlain established the colony of

New France in modern-day Quebec. Champlain was well aware of the value of trade with local groups, and established alliances with groups such as the Algonquin and the Huron. This alliance shaped local patterns over the long term; when Champlain allied himself with the Huron, their long-standing enemies, the Iroquois, allied themselves with the British.

Few French came to the settlement at New France. In part, this was because New France was primarily a trading operation rather than a settlement intended to establish a new, growing colony. Champlain was very conscious of how his traders interacted with local peoples, and established many rules of conduct that focused on French traders fitting into indigenous groups. For example, traders were to rely on Indians for food and support, living by the cultural rules of the local Indians, and were to fully honor indigenous ritual and ceremonial practices. Champlain, too, was held to this standard. For example, the Huron and other Northeastern groups did not see the French/Indian relationship as merely economic; it was a relationship that was both economic and political. Champlain found himself drawn into a war with the Iroquois after a year of trading with the Huron. The powerful local groups were eager to exploit the Europeans and their technology to their own ends in their own wars.

Although the French mission in Canada was primarily economic, they did try to Christianize some groups of Indians, most notably the Huron. In 1615, the first Jesuits (a monastic order of the Catholic Church) arrived in New France to go out among the Indians—particularly the Huron—to Christianize them. Over the next fifty years, the Jesuits worked among the Huron, learning their language and their culture. The efforts to Christianize the Huron were largely unsuccessful, with very few converts: perhaps less than ten converts in fifty years. However, The Jesuit experience in Canada is very significant as they wrote copious amounts of letters back to the Order in France, detailing the practices and beliefs of the Huron. Much of the information we have about the Huron and other groups in the Quebec area come from these letters.

3.5.2 The Dutch in the Americas

The Netherlands won independence from Spain at the end of the European Thirty Years' War. During the war and its aftermath, the Netherlands had emerged as the most important trading center in Europe, bringing great power and riches to the new nation. The Dutch had a long history in seafaring, mapmaking, and boatbuilding, and quickly entered the global spice trade competition. In 1602, the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) was founded. The DEIC was financed by shares that established the first modern stock exchange, making it the first multinational corporation. The company was granted a two decade long monopoly to carry out colonial activities in Asia

on behalf of the Dutch government. As a result, the DEIC possessed quasi-governmental powers, including the powers to wage wars, coin money, negotiate treaties, and establish colonies. The DEIC also possessed judicial powers, and was allowed to imprison and execute convicts.

The DEIC was by far the most successful European operator in Asian trade. They established colonies throughout the Malaccas, including the modern-day city of Jakarta, Indonesia. These port colonies allowed them to dominate the trade from within. Outside of the spice trade, the DEIC began a trade monopoly with Japan in 1640 at the trading post of Dejima, further empowering the Netherlands.

In 1652, the DEIC established an African colony near the Cape of Good Hope. The settlement of Cape Town was originally intended to be a way station for ships to resupply on the way to and from the Spice Islands. Instead, Cape Town quickly transformed into a permanent and growing colony known as Cape Colony. It grew into a sizable colony, and became one of the most developed European colonies outside of the Americas. Dutch farmers displaced local groups such as the pastoralist Khoikhoi. The colony's strategic location meant that almost every ship travelling from Europe to Asia stopped in Cape Town to resupply.

The Dutch were involved in the Americas in two main areas: the Caribbean and modern-day New York. By far, the Caribbean was the more important, richer area because of its sugar production. In the 1620s and 1630s, large fleets employed by the Dutch West Indies Company (DWIC) dominated the Caribbean. During these decades, the company was an instrument of war as well as a business; it waged war, but tried to turn a profit in the meantime. In the 1620s, much of Europe, including the Netherlands, was at war. The Republic of the Netherlands set up the DWIC in 1621 primarily to carry this European war into the Caribbean through piracy and conquest.

Much like the Dutch East India Company (DEIC), the DWIC was authorized to carry out trade and set up colonies. Unlike the DEIC, the DWIC focused on naval and military ambitions. The two companies were set up to function in tandem; the state assigned the DWIC a twenty-five year monopoly in every territory not given to the DEIC, including the Caribbean and the Americas. Like the DEIC, the DWIC's stock was listed on the Amsterdam exchange; this reflects that the Dutch colonial experience was primarily an economic one. Through the activities of the DEIC and the DWIC, the Netherlands sought to empower their nation through control of markets on a global scale, from Indonesia to the Caribbean.

In 1624, the DWIC launched large-scale attacks in the Caribbean with three goals in mind. First, they sought to occupy the rich Portuguese sugar plantations in Brazil. Second, they tried to conquer the Portuguese slave-

trading ports in West Africa, another lucrative trade. Finally, they sought to seize the treasure fleets that carried Peruvian and Mexican gold from Havana to Seville.

In all these efforts, the DWIC enjoyed initial victories but later failed. The Dutch conquered large parts of Brazil in the early 1630s and captured Portuguese slave-trading forts in Africa in the late 1630s. For a brief time, the DWIC successfully controlled the international sugar trade and the Atlantic slave trade. However in 1645, Portuguese Catholics in Brazil rose up in revolt and swept the Protestant Dutch out. While they were busy in Brazil, the Dutch were likewise busy in the Caribbean. They plundered Spanish merchant shipping, tried to capture the Spanish treasure fleets, and ran highly-successful smuggling operations in Spanish ports. The Dutch became the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean; the Spanish feared them, and English and French colonists often would prefer to trade with Dutch merchants (for their prices and reliability) than with their own mother countries. The Dutch, in great part because of the success of the DWIC, successfully contested Spain's economic hold over the Caribbean. Politically, the Dutch were less successful, able to maintain only six small islands of the Lesser Antilles as colonies.

The greatest economic victory for the Dutch came in 1628 when DWIC ships managed to trap the entire Mexican treasure fleet in Matanzas Bay off Cuba. They took an enormous treasure in gold, silver, and goods, and the company paid its shareholders a cash dividend of seventy percent in 1629. Until 1635, the company continued to mount large and costly expeditions to pillage Spanish settlements and shipping in the West Indies. Overall, the DWIC sent out 800 ships with 67,000 men between 1621 and 1637. But, the take was meager, and the shares sank on the Amsterdam exchange. However, the company's attacks, together with those of smaller fleets of Dutch, French, and English pirates did succeed in destroying Spanish commerce and communications. From 1625 to 1635, the Dutch maritime force changed the balance of power in the Caribbean, making it possible for Dutch traders to control most of the region's commerce for decades.

3.5.3 Before You Move On...

Key Concepts

Both the French and Dutch provided alternate models of colonial control in the Americas. Each of these countries sought to establish a foothold in the Americas through trade and commerce. Both sought to weaken the Spanish hold on the American hemisphere. After experimenting with colonization in Canada, the French attempted to

directly contest Spain's claim on *la Florida* (and thus their political control of North America) by establishing the colony of Fort Caroline, a move which proved to be a dismal failure. In the wake of their failure to secure Florida, the French established their main foothold in the New World in New France in Canada. French activities in the New World focused mostly on trade with groups such as the Huron and Algonquin in the fur trade. Because there were relatively few French in the colony, Samuel de Champlain's policies for French traders encouraged them to closely associate themselves with local groups.

The Dutch became the most important force in the spice trade under the aegis of the Dutch East India Company. Established in 1602, the DEIC was the first multinational company, and possessed quasi-governmental powers. The DEIC established trading posts and colonies in modern-day Indonesia and South Africa (Cape Colony). These ports established seats of power for the Dutch to take control and amass great wealth from the lucrative spice trade. The Dutch established their presence in the Caribbean through the Dutch West Indies Company, an institution that was authorized to carry out trade and set up colonies. They approached the Caribbean with three goals in mind: occupy the Portuguese sugar plantations in Brazil, conquer the Portuguese slave-trading ports in West Africa, and seize the treasure fleets that carried Peruvian and Mexican gold from Havana to Seville. The Dutch were able to control parts of Brazil's sugar trade and the West African slave ports for only a short time. They proved much more successful in controlling both legitimate and black market Caribbean trade, becoming the most powerful shipping empire in the Americas. The Dutch also practiced piracy in the Caribbean, and captured a Spanish treasure fleet in 1628, a major blow to the Spanish.

Test Yourself

1. _____'s expeditions in Canada established the local Indians' interest in French trade when the leader of Stadacona tried to detain him in order to control French and Indian trade networks.
 - a. Samuel de Champlain
 - b. Stadacona
 - c. Jacques Cartier
 - d. René Goulaine de Laudonnière

2. The French settlement in Florida was settled by Protestants unwelcome in France known as _____.
 - a. Huguenots
 - b. Anabaptists
 - c. Apostates
 - d. Catholics

3. The Jesuits
 - a. were a group of missionaries.
 - b. were largely unsuccessful in converting local Indians.
 - c. were a great source of knowledge about the Indians of New France.
 - d. all of the above

4. The Dutch practiced which of the following practices in establishing themselves as an economic powerhouse in the Caribbean?
 - a. legitimate trade
 - b. piracy
 - c. smuggling
 - d. all of the above

5. The Dutch East India Company possessed the power to
 - a. establish colonies
 - b. punish criminals
 - c. negotiate treaties
 - d. wage war
 - e. all of the above

[Click here to see answers](#)

3.6 Conclusion

The significance of the Columbian Exchange and sharing of foodways, technology, and cultures that resulted can hardly be overstated. A profound economic revolution shook both hemispheres as the influx of crops, diseases, animals, and metals to the Old World changed patterns of trade, the medium of exchange, and ideas about the use and distribution of wealth.

Similarly, traditional ideas about the structure and inhabitants of the world were put aside as Europeans and Indians encountered and ultimately learned from each other. Ethnicities were intertwined as Europeans, Africans, Indians, and their children created a complicated hierarchy of race and class in the colonies. The world had been turned upside down, perhaps for the first, if not for the last, time

Early Spanish control of the American hemisphere developed from their discovery and early exploration of the region. During this period, Spanish experiences largely defined early European knowledge of the Americas and Indians. The Spanish empire grew rapidly in the first fifty years after 1492, expanding throughout the Caribbean, Mesoamerica, and the Andes. Time and distance constituted two of the main challenges the Spanish faced in establishing and administering their new empires. The distance between Europe and the Americas played a very important role in shaping colonial administration as well as patterns and methods of imperial control for not only the Spanish, but for all European imperial powers.

Over the next hundred years, the Portuguese, the French, and the Dutch established colonies and areas of influence in the American hemisphere. Portugal, like Spain, sought to establish a settlement colony, controlled through direct political ties. Culturally, religiously, and socially, the colonies were deeply influenced by the mother country. The French and Dutch established very different models of colonial control. Both of these nations took a primarily economic interest in the American hemisphere, and shaped their models of colonial administration largely around trade. Politically, both France and the Netherlands wanted to weaken the Iberian hold on the Americas. The French actively contested Spanish power by trying to establish a colony in Spanish Florida. The Dutch were much less overt in their contestation of Iberian power; instead of establishing large, rival colonies, they concentrated on economically weakening the Spanish through piracy.

3.7 CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISES

- Read the description of the experience of the Spanish adventurer Lope de Aguirre. Compare this narrative to the letter written by Philip II just two years later. How did the views of these two men differ when it came to the Spanish enterprise in the New World? Why do you think the accounts differed as much as they did?
- The treatment of the Indians by the Europeans and such systems as the *encomienda* was decried by reformers beginning in the early sixteenth century. What reforms were advocated by Bartholomew de las Casas? Was reform even possible, or were the conditions imposed on the Natives inevitable?
- Which of the crops that originated in the New World had the greatest impact on the diets of those in the Old World of Europe, Asia, and Africa? Support your answer with specifics on nutrition, degree of spread, and ease of growing.

3.8 KEY TERMS

- Arab Middle Men
- Atahualpa
- *Audiencia*
- Aztecs/Mexica
- *Bandeirantes*
- Jacques Cartier
- Bartholomew de las Casas
- Samuel de Champlain
- Christopher Columbus
- *Corregidores*
- Hernán Cortés
- Councils of the Indies
- *Donatários*
- Dutch West Indies Company
- *Encomienda/encomenderos*
- Francisco Pizarro
- René Goulaine de Laudonnière
- *Haciendas*
- Huguenots
- Huitzilopochtli
- Huron
- Incas
- Jesuit
- La Malinche
- Pedro Menéndez de Avilés
- *Mestizos*
- *Mita*
- Moctezuma; Tenochtitlan
- Nahuatl
- Quetzalcoatl
- *Quinto*
- *Repartimiento*
- *Senado da Câmara*
- *Senhores de engenho*
- The Columbian Exchange
- Transculturation
- Treaty of Tordesillas

3.9 CHRONOLOGY

The following chronology is a list of important dates and events associated with this chapter.

Date	Event
1477-1495	Reign of John II of Portugal
1492-1503	Voyages of Columbus to the New World
1492	Columbian Exchange began between the Old and New Worlds
1494	Treaty of Toresillas signed
1500	Pedro Cabral claimed Brazil for the Portuguese Crown
1518	Atlantic Slave Trade began
1516-1556	Reign of Charles I of Spain (Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire)
1534-1542	Voyages of Jacques Cartier
1564	René Goulaine de Laudonnière led French expedition to Florida, founded Fort Caroline
1565	Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded St. Augustine, invaded and destroyed Fort Caroline settlement
1556-1598	Reign of Philip II of Spain
1519	Spanish Conquest of Tenochtitlan began
1520	<i>La Noche Triste</i>
1521	Tenochtitlan fell to the Spanish under Cortés
1533	Pizarro conquered the Inca Empire
1552	De Las Casas publishes <i>A Short Account of the History of the Indies</i>
1588	The Spanish Armada sailed against England
1603	Samuel de Champlain established the colony of New France
1615	First Jesuits arrived in New France
1624	Dutch West India Company active in Caribbean
1628	Dutch West India Company captured Spanish treasure fleet

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3.11 END NOTES

1 Chasteen, 75.

2 Phillip II of Spain, *Two Letters on the Gold of the Indies*, 1559, at Then Again, <http://www.thenagain.info/Classes/Sources/PhilipII.html>.

3 Philip II, *Two Letters*.

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- 4 Letter of Lope Aguirre to Philip II of Spain, 1561, in *Modern History Sourcebooks*.
- 5 Cortés quoted in McKay, Hill, Buckler, *A History of World Societies*, v. 1, 9th edition (New York: Bedford, St. Martins, 466.
- 6 Columbus, Journal, October, 1492 in The History Guide, <http://www.historyguide.org/early-mod/columbus.html>.
- It should be remembered that each type of original document contains the bias of the writer. Europeans came to the New World convinced of their own innate superiority and intelligence. Thus they were preconditioned to see the people they encountered as subordinate and subservient. Moreover, they approached Indian lives with the idea that life in Europe was "civilized" and the way in which the natives of the New World lived was something less. It was not uncommon for Europeans to see the Indians as open, affable and innocent.*
- 7 Columbus, Journal, October, 1492.
- 8 Columbus, Journal, October 1492.
- 9 Cabeza de Vaca, *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America*, in *Modern History Sourcebooks*, ed. Paul Halsall, www.fordham.edu/halsall.
- 10 Bartolomé de las Casas quoted *Latin American Civilization*, ed. Benjamin Keen, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 2000), 67.
- 11 Cortés, quoted in Mark A Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson. *Colonial Latin America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 4.
- 12 Cortés, *Second Letter to Charles V*, in *Modern History Sourcebooks*, ed. Paul Halsall.
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- 15 John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire* (NY: WW Norton, 2001), 50.
- 16 Quoted in Burkholder, 44.
- 17 Bernal Diaz, *True History of the Conquest of Spain*, ed. RB Cunninghame-Graham. Internet Archive, <http://www.archive.org/stream/bernardiaz.txt>), 22.
- 18 Camilla Townsend, "Burying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico," *American Historical Review*, vol. 108 (June 2003), 659-687.
- 19 Cortés, *Letter to Charles V*.
- 20 Leon Portilla, *Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, <http://ambergriscaye.com/pages/mayan/aztec.html>.
- 21 Qtd. in Burkhart, 49.
- 22 *Aztec Account*.
- 23 Cieza de León, Pedro. *Chronicles of the Incas*, 1540, *Modern History Sourcebooks*, ed. Paul Halsall.

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24 Burkholder, 66; Chasteen, 42.

25 Chasteen, 48.

26 Chasteen, 51.

27 Chasteen, 66-70.

28 Keen, 67.

29 Anchieta in *Latin American Civilization*, 164.

30 Qtd. in Laurence Whitehead. *Latin America: A New Interpretation*. New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2006, 58.

31 Whitehead, 58-60.

ANSWER KEY FOR CHAPTER THREE: INITIAL CONTACT AND CONQUEST

Check your answers to the questions in the Before You Move On Sections for this chapter. You can click on the questions to take you back to the chapter section.

Correct answers are **BOLDED**

Section 3.2.3 - p77

1. Which of the following animals did **not** originate in the Old World of Europe, Africa, or Asia?
 - A. LLAMAS**
 - b. Cattle
 - c. Sheep
 - d. Pigs
2. Which of the following crops originated in the New World?
 - a. Oats
 - B. PEANUTS**
 - c. Barley
 - d. Coffee
3. What crop was so controversial that monarchs in Europe and China attempted to ban its use?
 - A. TOBACCO**
 - b. Rice
 - c. Potato
 - d. Wheat
4. Which of the following crops did **not** originate in the New World?
 - a. Tobacco
 - b. Maize
 - c. Potato
 - D. WHEAT**
5. Which of the following European diseases was responsible for the greatest number of Amerindian deaths in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries?
 - a. Measles
 - b. Influenza
 - c. Bubonic Plague
 - D. SMALLPOX**

Section 3.3.2 - p85

1. Which of the follow was well known for his criticism of the Europeans' treatment of the Indians of Meso- and South America?
 - a. Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca
 - b. Hernán Cortés
 - C. BARTHOLOMEW DE LAS CASAS**
 - d. Pedro Cabral
2. The *Treaty of Tordesillas*
 - A. DIVIDED THE NEW WORLD BETWEEN THE SPANISH AND THE PORTUGUESE.**
 - b. Specified that the *encomienda* system should be disbanded.
 - c. Allowed the use of Incas in the mines of Peru.
 - d. Formally recognized the conquest of the Aztec Empire by Cortés and his soldiers.

CHAPTER THREE: INITIAL CONTACT AND CONQUEST

- The majority of the natives killed in the exploration period were slaughtered by the Europeans who possessed superior weapons.
 - True
 - FALSE**
- The first explorer to reach Brazil and claim it for the throne of Portugal was:
 - Christopher Columbus
 - PEDRO CABRAL**
 - Ferdinand Magellan
 - Jacques Cartier
- Recruiting native allies played an important role in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec.
 - TRUE**
 - False
- The myth of Quetzalcoatl relies on sources that are contemporaneous with the conquest of the Aztec.
 - True
 - FALSE**

Section 3.4.3 - p90

- The system that helped provide labor for the Spanish mines and sugar plantations was the:
 - Quinto*
 - Audiencia*
 - ENCOMIENDA**
 - Residencia*
- The Brazilian economy was largely based on
 - SUGAR**
 - Coffee
 - Silver
 - Indigo
- The _____ was part of the bureaucracy of Spanish rule and oversaw developments in New Spain until the close of the colonial period.
 - Encomienda*
 - Mita*
 - COUNCIL OF THE INDIES**
 - Donatários*

Section 3.5.3 - p97

- _____’s expeditions in Canada established the local Indians’ interest in French trade when the leader of Stadacona tried to detain him in order to control French and Indian trade networks.
 - Samuel de Champlain
 - Stadacona
 - JACQUES CARTIER**
 - René Goulaine de Laudonnière
- The French settlement in Florida was settled by Protestants unwelcome in France known as _____.
 - HUGUENOTS**
 - Anabaptists
 - Apostates
 - Catholics

CHAPTER THREE: INITIAL CONTACT AND CONQUEST

3. The Jesuits
 - A. WERE A GROUP OF MISSIONARIES.**
 - b. were largely unsuccessful in converting local Indians.
 - c. were a great source of knowledge about the Indians of New France.
 - d. all of the above

4. The Dutch practiced which of the following practices in establishing themselves as an economic powerhouse in the Caribbean?
 - a. legitimate trade
 - b. piracy
 - c. smuggling
 - D. ALL OF THE ABOVE**

5. The Dutch East India Company possessed the power to
 - a. establish colonies
 - b. punish criminals
 - c. negotiate treaties
 - d. wage war
 - E. ALL OF THE ABOVE**