MEXICO: HERNANDO CORTES is greeted by Montezuma’s messenger in 1519: Mexican Indian painting, 16th century.
Chapter Outline

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After a difficult journey of over two hundred miles, the exhausted man arrived at the royal palace in the grand city of Tenochtitlán. He had hurried all the way from the Gulf Coast with important news for the Aztec leader, Moctezuma.

Our lord and king, forgive my boldness. I am from Mictlanauhtla. When I went to the shores of the great sea, there was a mountain range or small mountain floating in the midst of the water, and moving here and there without touching the shore. My lord, we have never seen the like of this, although we guard the coast and are always on watch.

[When Moctezuma sent some officials to check on the messenger’s story, they confirmed his report.]

Our lord and king, it is true that strange people have come to the shores of the great sea. They were fishing from a small boat, some with rods and others with a net. They fished until late and then they went back to their two great towers and climbed up into them. . . . They have very light skin, much lighter than ours. They all have long beards, and their hair comes only to their ears.

Chapter 1  Worlds Apart

**Moctezuma was filled** with foreboding when he received the messenger’s initial report. Aztec religion placed great emphasis on omens and prophecies, which were thought to foreshadow coming events. Several unusual omens had recently occurred—blazing lights in the sky, one temple struck by lightning and another that spontaneously burst into flames, monstrous beings that appeared and then vanished. Now light-skinned strangers suddenly appeared offshore. Aztec spiritual leaders regarded all these signs as unfavorable and warned that trouble lay ahead.

The messenger’s journey to Tenochtitlán occurred in 1519. The “mountains” he saw were in fact the sails of European ships, and the strange men were Spanish soldiers under the command of Hernán Cortés. Like Columbus’s voyage to the Caribbean in 1492, Cortés’s arrival in Mexico is considered a key episode in the European discovery of the “New World.” But we might just as accurately view the messenger’s entry into the Aztec capital as announcing the native Mexicans’ discovery of a New World to the east, from which the strangers must have come. Neither the Aztecs nor the Spaniards could have foreseen the far-reaching consequences of these twin discoveries. Before long, a variety of peoples—Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans—who had previously lived worlds apart would come together to create a world that was new to all of them.

This new world reflected the diverse experiences of the many peoples who built it. Improving economic conditions in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries propelled Europeans overseas to seek new opportunities for trade and settlement. Spain, Portugal, France, and England competed for political, economic, and religious domination within Europe, and their conflict carried over into the Americas. Native Americans drew upon their familiarity with the land and its resources, patterns of political and religious authority, and systems of trade and warfare to deal with the European newcomers. Africans did not come voluntarily to the Americas but were brought by the Europeans to work as slaves. They too would draw on their cultural heritage to cope with both a new land and a new, harsh condition of life.

**KEY TOPICS**

- Native American, West African, and European societies on the eve of contact
- The reasons for Europe’s impulse to global exploration
- The Spanish, French, and English experiences in America in the sixteenth century
- Consequences of contact between the Old and New Worlds

**NATIVE AMERICAN SOCIETIES BEFORE 1492**

In 1492, the year Columbus landed on a tiny Caribbean island, perhaps 70 million people—nearly equal to the population of Europe at that time—lived on the continents of North and South America, most of them south of the present border between the United States and Mexico. They belonged to hundreds of groups, each with its own language or dialect, history, and way of life. In their own languages, many native groups called themselves “the original people” or “the true men.” Europeans came to call them “Indians,” following Columbus’s mistaken first impression that he had arrived in the East Indies when his ships reached an island in the Bahamas.

From the start, the original inhabitants of the Americas were peoples in motion. The first migrants may have arrived over forty thousand years ago, traveling from cen-
Central Siberia and slowly making their way to southern South America. These people, and subsequent migrants from Eurasia, probably traveled across a land bridge that emerged across what is now the Bering Strait. During the last Ice Age, much of the earth’s water was frozen in huge glaciers. This process lowered ocean levels, exposing a 600-mile-wide land bridge between Asia and America. Recent research examining genetic and linguistic similarities between Asian and Native American populations suggests that there may have been later migrations as well. Asian seafarers may have crossed the Pacific to settle portions of western North and South America, while as recently as eight thousand years ago, a final migration may have brought Siberians to what is now Alaska and northern Canada.

**Paleo-Indians and the Archaic Period**

The earliest Americans, called *Paleo-Indians* by archaeologists, traveled in small bands, tracking and killing mammoths, bison, and other large game. These animals were often easy prey, for they had never before encountered human hunters. Archaeologists working near present-day Clovis, New Mexico, have found numerous carefully crafted spear points—some of which may be over thirteen thousand years old—that testify to Paleo-Indians’ expertise. Such efficient tools possibly contributed to overhunting, for by about 9000 B.C., mammoths, mastodons, and other large game had become extinct in the Americas. Climatic change also hastened the animals’ disappearance. Around twelve thousand years ago, the world’s climate began to grow warmer, turning grasslands into deserts and reducing the animals’ food supply. This meant that humans too had to find other food sources.

Between roughly 8000 B.C. and 1500 B.C.—what archaeologists call the *Archaic period*—the Native American population grew and people began living in larger communities. Men and women assumed more specialized roles. Men did most of the hunting and fishing, activities that required travel. Women remained closer to home, gathering and preparing wild plant foods and caring for children. Each group made the tools it used, with men carving fishhooks and arrowheads, and women making such items as bone needles and baskets.

Across the continent, native communities participated in a complex trade network. Trade was not limited to material goods, but also included exchanges of marriage partners, laborers, ideas, and religious practices. Trade networks sometimes extended over great distances. Valuable goods, such as copper from the Great Lakes area and shells from the Gulf of Mexico, have been discovered at archaeological sites far from their places of origin. Ideas about death and the afterlife also passed between groups. So too did certain burial practices, such as the placing of

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**CHRONOLOGY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. 40,000–</td>
<td>Ancestors of Native Americans cross Bering bridge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8000 B.C.</td>
<td>Paleo-Indians expand through the Americas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 10,000–</td>
<td>Extinction of large land mammals in North America.</td>
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<td>9000 B.C.</td>
<td>Archaea Indian era.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 8000–</td>
<td>Beginnings of agriculture in Mesoamerica.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1500 B.C.</td>
<td>Earliest mound-building culture begins.</td>
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<td>c. 3000 B.C.</td>
<td>Adena-Hopewell mound-building culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1500 B.C.</td>
<td>Rise of West African empires.</td>
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<td>c. 500 B.C.–</td>
<td>First mounds built at Cahokia.</td>
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<td>A.D. 400</td>
<td>Ancestral Puebloan expansion.</td>
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<td>c. A.D. 700–1600</td>
<td>Spread of Islam in West Africa.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1000</td>
<td>First Viking voyages to North America.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1000–1015</td>
<td>Last mound-building culture, the Mississippian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1290s</td>
<td>Ancestral Puebloan dispersal into smaller villages.</td>
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<td>1400–1600</td>
<td>Renaissance in Europe.</td>
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<td>1430s</td>
<td>Beginnings of Portuguese slave trade in West Africa.</td>
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<td>1492</td>
<td>End of reconquista in Spain.</td>
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<td>1494</td>
<td>Treaty of Tordesillas.</td>
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<td>1497</td>
<td>John Cabot visits Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.</td>
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<td>1497–1499</td>
<td>Vasco da Gama sails around Africa to reach India.</td>
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<td>1517</td>
<td>Protestant Reformation begins in Germany.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1519–1521</td>
<td>Hernán Cortés conquers the Aztec empire.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1532–1533</td>
<td>Francisco Pizarro conquers the Inca empire.</td>
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<td>1534–1542</td>
<td>Jacques Cartier explores eastern Canada for France.</td>
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<td>1540–1542</td>
<td>Coronado explores southwestern North America.</td>
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<td>1542–1543</td>
<td>Roberval’s failed colony in Canada.</td>
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<td>1558</td>
<td>Elizabeth I becomes queen of England.</td>
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<td>1565</td>
<td>Spanish establish outpost at St. Augustine in Florida.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1560–1580</td>
<td>English renew attempts to conquer Ireland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1587</td>
<td>Founding of “Lost Colony” of Roanoke.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1598</td>
<td>Spanish found colony at New Mexico.</td>
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valued possessions in the grave along with the deceased person’s body. In some areas, the increasing complexity of exchange networks, as well as competition for resources, encouraged concentrations of political power. Chiefs might manage trade relations and conduct diplomacy for groups of villages rather than for a single community.

The Development of Agriculture

In the latter half of the Archaic period, some Native Americans made a momentous social and economic adaptation when they began farming. Agriculture in the Americas began around 3000 B.C., when the people of central Mexico started raising an ancient type of maize, or corn. Farming had already appeared independently in other parts of the world, including the Middle East, Southeast Asia, China, and India. Archaeologists speculate that agriculture first developed in areas where population growth threatened to outrun the wild food supply. Women, with their knowledge of wild plants, probably discovered how to save seeds and cultivate them, becoming the world’s first farmers.

Farming in the Americas initially supplemented a diet still largely dependent on hunting and gathering, but gradually assumed a greater role. In addition to maize, the main crop in both South and North America, farmers in Mexico, Central America, and the Peruvian Andes learned to cultivate peppers, beans, pumpkins, squash, avocados, sweet and white potatoes (native to the Peruvian highlands), and tomatoes. Mexican farmers also grew cotton. Maize and bean cultivation spread from Mexico in a wide arc to the north and east. Peoples in what is now the southwestern United States began farming between 1500 and 500 B.C., and by A.D. 200, farmers were tilling the soil in present-day Georgia and Florida.

Wherever agriculture took hold, important social changes followed. Populations grew, because farming produced a more secure food supply than did hunting and gathering. Permanent villages appeared as farmers settled near their fields. In central Mexico, agriculture eventually sustained the populations of large cities. Trade in agricultural surpluses flowed through networks of exchange. In many Indian societies, women’s status improved because of their role as the principal farmers. Specialized craft workers produced pottery and baskets to store harvested grains. Even religious beliefs adapted to the increasing importance of farming. In describing the origins of their people, Pueblo Indians of the Southwest compared their emergence from the underworld to a maize plant sprouting from the earth.

The development of agriculture further enhanced the diversity of Native American peoples. Even so, certain generalizations can be made about societies that developed within broad regions, or culture areas (see Map 1–1). Within each area, inhabitants shared basic patterns of subsistence and social organization, largely reflecting the natural environment to which they had adapted.

Nonfarming Societies

Throughout the North and West, Indians prospered without adopting agriculture. In the challenging environment of the Arctic and Subarctic, small nomadic bands moved seasonally to fish, follow game, and, in the brief summers, gather wild berries. Far to the north, Eskimos and Aleuts hunted whales, seals, and other sea mammals. Farther inland, the Crees and other peoples followed migrating herds of caribou and moose. Northern peoples fashioned tools and weapons of bone and ivory, clothing and boats from animal skins, and houses of whalebones and hides or blocks of sod or snow. Many of their rituals and songs celebrated the hunt and the spiritual connection between humans and the animals on which they depended.

Along the Northwest Coast and the Columbia River Plateau, abundant resources supported one of the most
Over the course of centuries, Indian peoples in North America developed distinctive cultures suited to the environments in which they lived. Inhabitants of each culture area shared basic patterns of subsistence, craft work, and social organization. Most, but not all, Indian peoples combined farming with hunting and gathering.
densely populated areas of North America. With rivers teeming with salmon and other fish, and forests full of game and edible plants, people prospered without resorting to farming. Among such groups as the Kwakiutls and Chinooks, extended families lived in large communal houses located in villages of up to several hundred residents. Local rulers displayed their prominence most conspicuously during potlatches, or ceremonies in which wealth was distributed among guests in order to celebrate the power of the hosts. Artisans used the region’s plentiful wood supply to make many items, including distinctive religious masks and memorial poles carved with images of supernatural beings.

Farther south, in present-day California, hunter-gatherers lived in smaller villages, several of which might be led by the same chief. These settlements usually adjoined oak groves, where Indians gathered acorns. To protect their access to this important food, chiefs and villagers
vigorously defended their territorial claims to the oak groves. Elsewhere, in the foothills of the Sierras, Indians periodically set fire to thick underbrush to hasten the growth of new shoots that would attract deer and other game.

Small nomadic bands in the Great Basin, where the climate was warm and dry, learned to survive on the region’s limited resources. Shoshone hunters captured antelope in corral and trapped small game, such as squirrels and rabbits. In what is now Utah and western Colorado, Utes hunted elk, bison, and mountain sheep and fished in mountain streams. Women gathered pinyon nuts, seeds, and wild berries. In hard times, people ate rattlesnakes, horned toads, and insects.

**Mesoamerican Civilizations**

Mesoamerica, the birthplace of agriculture in North America, extends from central Mexico into Central America. A series of complex, literate, urban cultures emerged in this region beginning around 1200 B.C. Among the earliest was that of the Olmecs, who flourished on Mexico’s Gulf Coast from about 1200 to 400 B.C. The Olmecs and other early Mesoamerican peoples built cities featuring large pyramids, developed religious practices that included human sacrifice, and devised calendars and writing systems. Two of the most prominent Mesoamerican civilizations that followed the Olmecs were those of the Mayans in the Yucatán and Guatemala and the Aztecs of Teotihuacán in central Mexico.

**The Mayans.** Mayan civilization reached its greatest glory between about A.D. 150 and 900 in the southern Yucatán, creating Mesoamerica’s most advanced writing and calendrical systems and developing a sophisticated mathematics that included the concept of zero. The Mayans of the southern Yucatán suffered a decline after 900, but there were still many thriving Mayan centers in the northern Yucatán when Europeans arrived in the Americas. The great city of Teotihuacán dominated central Mexico from the first century to the eighth century A.D. and influenced much of the rest of Mesoamerica through trade and conquest.

**The Aztecs.** Some two hundred years after the fall of Teotihuacán, the Toltecs, a warrior people, rose to prominence, dominating central Mexico from about 900 to 1100. In the wake of the Toltec collapse, the Aztecs, another warrior people, migrated from the north into the Valley of Mexico and built a great empire that soon controlled much of Mesoamerica. The magnificent Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, was a city of great plazas, broad avenues, magnificent temples and palaces, and busy marketplaces. Built on islands in the middle of Lake Texcoco, it was connected to the mainland by four broad causeways. In 1492, Tenochtitlán was home to some 200,000 people, making it one of the largest cities in the world at the time.

The great pyramid in Tenochtitlán’s principal temple complex was the center of Aztec religious life. Here Aztec priests sacrificed human victims—by cutting open their chests and removing their still-beating hearts—to offer to the gods. Human sacrifice had been part of Mesoamerican religion since the time of the Olmecs. People believed that such ceremonies pleased the gods and prevented them from destroying the earth. The Aztecs, however, practiced sacrifice on a much larger scale than ever before. Hundreds, even thousands, of victims died in ceremonies that sometimes lasted for days.

Aztec culture expanded through continuous military conquest, driven by a quest for sacrificial victims and for wealth in the form of tribute payments of gold, food, and handcrafted goods. But as the empire grew, it became increasingly vulnerable to internal division. Neighboring peoples hated the Aztecs and submitted to them out of fear rather than loyalty.

**North America’s Diverse Cultures**

North of Mexico, the introduction of a drought-resistant type of maize around 400 B.C. enabled a series of cultures sharing certain characteristics with Mesoamerica to develop. Beginning about 300 B.C., the Hohokams settled in permanent villages in southern Arizona and devised elaborate irrigation systems that allowed them to harvest two crops of corn, beans, and squash each year. Artisans wove cotton cloth and made goods reflecting Mesoamerican artistic styles out of shell, turquoise, and clay. Extensive trade networks linked the Hohokams to people living as far away as California and Mexico. Their culture endured for over a thousand years but mysteriously disappeared by 1450.

**Ancestral Puebloans.** Early in the first century A.D., Ancestral Puebloan peoples (sometimes called Anasazis) began to settle in farming communities where the borders of present-day Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico meet. Scarce rainfall, routed through dams and hillside terraces, watered the crops. Networks of roads carried people and goods between villages. Artisans crafted intricate baskets and distinctive black-on-white pottery for use and trade.

Ancestral Puebloans originally lived in villages, or pueblos (pueblo is the Spanish word for “village”) built on mesas and canyon floors located in New Mexico’s Chaco Canyon, a region that contained a dozen large towns, hundreds of outlying villages, and perhaps as many as fifteen thousand people. The largest town, Pueblo Bonito, covered 3 acres and contained about twelve hundred inhabitants. Its main structure, a four-story-tall complex of over...
800 rooms and numerous kivas, or ceremonial centers, served as one of several centers of production and exchange throughout the area. But after about 1200, villagers began carving multistoried stone houses into steep canyon walls, dwellings that could only be reached by difficult climbs up steep cliffs and along narrow ledges. Archaeologists suspect that warfare and climate change worked together to force the Puebloans into these precarious homes.

Around 1200, the climate of the Southwest grew colder, making it more difficult to grow enough to feed the large population. Food scarcity, in turn, may have set village against village and encouraged attacks by outsiders. Villagers probably resorted to cliff dwellings for defensive purposes as violence spread in the region. By 1300, survivors abandoned the cliff dwellings and dispersed into much smaller villages along the Rio Grande. Their descendants include the Hopis and Zunis, as well as other Puebloan peoples in the desert Southwest. In many pueblos dispersed throughout the region, men farmed—in contrast to the predominant pattern of women farmers elsewhere in Native America—and raised corn, beans, squash, and sunflowers. They established new patterns of exchange with nomadic hunting peoples, such as the Apaches and Navajos, who brought buffalo meat and hides to trade for Pueblo corn, cotton blankets, pottery, and other goods.

Plains Indians. The Great Plains of the continent’s interior were much less densely settled than the desert Southwest. Mandans, Pawnees, and other groups settled along river valleys, where women farmed and men hunted bison, whose skin and bones were used for clothing, shelter, and tools. Plains Indians moved frequently, seeking more fertile land or better hunting. Wherever they went, they traded skins, food, and obsidian (a volcanic glass used for tools and weapons) with other native peoples.

Mound-building cultures. The gradual spread of agriculture transformed native societies in the Eastern Woodlands, a vast territory extending from the Mississippi Valley to the Atlantic seaboard. Although the process began around 2500 B.C., farming was not firmly established until about A.D. 700. As agriculture spread, several “mound-building” societies—named for the large earthworks their members constructed—developed in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys. The oldest flourished in Louisiana between 1500 and 700 B.C. The members of the Adena-Hopewell culture, which appeared in the Ohio Valley between 500 B.C. and A.D. 400, lived in small villages spread over a wide area. They built hundreds of mounds, often in the shapes of humans, birds, and serpents. Most were grave sites, where people were buried with valuable goods. Many burial objects were made from materials obtained through long-distance trade, including Wyoming obsidian, Lake Superior copper, and Florida conch shells.

The last mound-building culture, the Mississippian, emerged between 1000 and 1500 in the Mississippi Valley. Mississippian farmers raised enough food to support sizable populations and major urban centers. One of the largest of these was Cahokia, located near present-day St. Louis in a fertile floodplain with access to the major river systems of the continent’s interior. By 1250, Cahokia had
perhaps twenty thousand residents, making it nearly as large as medieval London and the largest American city north of Mexico. Its political leaders—who were worshiped as deities—collected tribute, redistributed goods, coordinated trade and diplomacy, and mobilized laborers to build large structures and earthworks. Cahokia dominated the Mississippi Valley, linked by trade in food and other products to dozens of villages in the Midwestern region.

Mississippian culture began to decline in the thirteenth century. Archaeologists suspect that an ecological crisis led to Cahokia’s fall. Population may have outstripped the food supply, and a series of hot, dry summers created further hardship. By 1400, most of Cahokia’s residents were dispersed into scattered farming villages.

What followed in the eastern Woodlands region was a century or more of warfare and political instability. In the vacuum left by Cahokia’s decline, other groups sought to exert more power. In the northeast, the Iroquois and Hurons moved from dispersed settlements into fortified villages. The Hurons, who farmed in the Great Lakes area, formed new exchange networks with hunter-gatherers to the north, while the Iroquois limited their ties with outsiders. Both the Hurons and the Iroquois formed confederacies that were intended to diminish internal conflicts and increase spiritual strength. Among the Iroquois, five separate nations—the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas—joined to create the Great League of Peace and Power around the year 1450. Similar developments occurred in the southeast, where chronic instability led to regional alliances and the periodic emergence of centers of trade and political power. One such center at Etowah, in northwestern Georgia, prospered until about 1400, at which point it gave way to a new chiefdom at Coosa.

Eastern Woodlands peoples were the first to encounter English explorers, and later, English settlers, at the start of the seventeenth century. By that point these native peoples relied on a mixture of agriculture and hunting, fishing, and gathering for their subsistence. They lived in villages with a few hundred residents, with greater densities of settlement in the south (where a warmer climate and longer growing season prevailed) than in the north. Although early colonists sometimes described these Indian groups as nomadic, they in fact inhabited semipermanent villages and moved only when declining soil fertility or, in some instances, warfare compelled them to shift location. For the most part, their principal villages were near the coast or along rivers, where the greatest diversity of natural resources could be found.

The Caribbean Islanders
The Caribbean islands were peopled by mainland dwellers who began moving to the islands around 5000 B.C. Ancestors of the Taínos probably came from what is now Venezuela. The Guanahatabeys of western Cuba originated in Florida, and the Caribs of the easternmost islands moved from Brazil’s Orinoco Valley. Surviving at first by hunting and gathering, island peoples began farming perhaps in the first century A.D. They raised manioc, sweet potatoes, maize, squash, beans, peppers, peanuts, and pineapple on clearings made in the tropical forests. Canoes carried trade goods throughout the Caribbean, as well as to Mesoamerica and coastal South America.

By 1492, as many as 4 million people may have inhabited the Caribbean islands. Powerful chiefs ruled over villages, conducted war and diplomacy, and controlled the distribution of food and other goods obtained as tribute from villagers. Island societies were divided into several ranks. An elite group aided the chief and supplied religious leaders. Below them were a large class of ordinary farmers and fishermen and a lower class of servants who worked for the elites. Elite islanders were easily recognized by their fine clothing, bright feather headdresses, and golden ear and
nose ornaments—items that eventually attracted the attention of European visitors.

Long before Europeans reached North America, the continent’s inhabitants had witnessed centuries of dynamic change. Empires rose and fell, and new ones took their place. Large cities flourished and disappeared. Periods of warfare occasionally disrupted the lives of thousands of individuals. The Europeans’ arrival, at the end of the fifteenth century, coincided with a period of particular instability, as various Native American groups competed for dominance in the wake of the collapse of the centralized societies at Cahokia and Chaco Canyon. Yet at the same time, Native American societies experienced important continuities. These included an ability to adapt to widely varying environmental conditions, the preservation of religious and ceremonial traditions, and an eagerness to forge relationships of exchange with neighboring peoples. Both continuities with past experience and more recent circumstances of political change would shape the ways native peoples would eventually respond to the European newcomers.

**WEST AFRICAN SOCIETIES**

In the three centuries after 1492, fully six out of seven people who crossed the Atlantic to the Americas were not Europeans but Africans. They came from the world’s second-largest continent and the one with the longest record of human habitation, where the ancestors of modern humans (Homo sapiens) appeared 130,000 or more years ago. Like the Americas, Africa had witnessed the rise of many ancient and diverse cultures (see Map 1-2). They ranged from the sophisticated Egyptian civilization that developed in the Nile Valley over 5000 years ago to the powerful twelfth-century chiefdoms of Zimbabwe to the West African empires that flourished in the time of Columbus and Cortés. The vast majority of Africans who came to the Americas after 1492 arrived as slaves, transported by Europeans eager to exploit their labor. Although they were involuntary immigrants, Africans could draw upon their ancient cultural heritages to help shape the New World in which they found themselves.

**Geographical and Political Differences**

Most African immigrants to the Americas came from the continent’s western regions. Extending from the southern edge of the Sahara Desert toward the equator and inland for nearly a thousand miles, West Africa was an area of contrasts. On the whole a sparsely settled region, West Africa nevertheless contained numerous more densely inhabited communities. Many of these settlements clung to the coast, but several important cities lay well inland. Perhaps the greatest of these metropolises was Timbuktu, which had as many as 70,000 residents in the fifteenth century. At that time, Timbuktu served as the seat of the powerful Songhai empire, and was an important center of trade and government.

The Songhai empire was only the latest in a series of powerful states to develop in the region. One of the earliest, Ghana, rose to prominence in the eighth century and dominated West Africa for nearly three hundred years. Its successor, Mali, emerged around 1200 and lasted another three centuries. Songhai, larger and wealthier than its predecessors, dominated the area from around 1450 until it fell to a Moroccan invasion in 1591. Equivalently large empires did not appear in coastal West Africa, although the Asante, Dahomey, Oyo, and Bini kingdoms there grew to be quite powerful. Other coastal peoples, such as the Mendes and Igbos, were decentralized, living in scattered autonomous villages.

*Craftsmen from the West African kingdom of Benin were renowned for their remarkable bronze sculptures. This intricate bronze plaque depicts four African warriors in full military dress. The two tiny figures in the background may be Portuguese soldiers, who first arrived in Benin in the late fifteenth century.*

MAP 1–2 West Africa and Europe in 1492

Before Columbus's voyage, Europeans knew little about the world beyond the Mediterranean basin and the coast of West Africa. Muslim merchants from North Africa largely controlled European traders' access to African gold and other materials.
Geographical as well as political differences marked the inland and coastal regions. In the vast grasslands of the interior, people raised cattle and cultivated millet and sorghum. In the 1500s, European visitors introduced varieties of Asian rice, which soon became another important crop. On the coast—where rain falls nearly every day—people grew yams, bananas, and various kinds of beans and peas in forest clearings. They also kept sheep, goats, and poultry.

Artisans and merchants. West Africans were skilled artisans and particularly fine metalworkers. Smiths in Benin produced intricate bronze sculptures, and Asante craftsmen designed distinctive miniature gold weights. West African smiths also used their skills to forge weapons, attesting to the frequent warfare between West African states.

Complex trade networks linked inland and coastal states, and long-distance commercial connections tied West Africa to southern Europe and the Middle East. West African merchants exchanged locally mined gold with traders from North Africa for salt, a commodity so rare in West Africa that it was sometimes literally worth its weight in gold. North African merchants also bought West African pepper, leather, and ivory. The wealth generated by this trans-Saharan trade contributed to the rise of the Songhai and earlier empires.

Farming and gender roles. Most West Africans were farmers, not merchants. A daily round of work, family duties, and worship defined their lives. West African men and women shared agricultural tasks. Men prepared fields for planting, while women cultivated the crops, harvested them, and dried grain for storage. Men also hunted and, in the grassland regions, herded cattle. Women in the coastal areas owned and cared for other livestock, including goats and sheep. West African women regularly traded goods, including the crops they grew, in local markets and were thus essential to the vitality of local economies.

Family Structure and Religion
Family connections were exceedingly important to West Africans, helping to define each person’s place in society. Children were especially cherished; one Yoruba proverb stated that “Without children you are naked.” High rates of infant and child mortality—attributable in good part to a harsh disease environment—made offspring all the more precious, for parents depended on their children for labor and for support in old age. In some regions, men who could afford to do so had more than one wife, thus increasing their chances of having surviving offspring. While ties between parents and children were of central importance, West Africans also emphasized their links with aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Groups of families formed clans that further extended an individual’s kin ties. Most clans were patrilineal—tracing descent through the father’s line—but some, for instance among the Akans and Igbos, were matrilineal. These links enmeshed West Africans in a web of family ties.

Religious beliefs magnified the powerful influence of family on African life. Ideas and practices focused on themes of fertility, prosperity, health, and social harmony. Because many West Africans believed that their ancestors acted as mediators between the worlds of the living and the dead, they held elaborate funerals for deceased members and continued to perform public rituals at their grave sites. Such rituals helped keep the memory of ancestors alive for younger generations.

Most West Africans believed in a supreme being and several subordinate deities. Like Native Americans, they performed ceremonies to ensure the goodwill of the spiritual forces that suffused the natural world. West African medicine men and women used rituals to protect people from evil spirits and sorcerers. Religious ceremonies were held in sacred places—often near water—but not in buildings that Europeans recognized as churches. And like the Indians, West Africans preserved their faith through oral traditions, not written texts.

Islam began to take root in West Africa around the eleventh century, probably introduced by Muslim traders from North Africa. By the fifteenth century, the cities of Timbuktu and Djenné had become centers of Islamic learning, attracting students from as far away as southern Europe. Urban dwellers, especially merchants, were more likely to convert to the new religion, as were some rulers. Farmers, however, accustomed to religious rituals that focused on agricultural fertility, were prone to resist Islamic influence more strongly.

European Merchants in West Africa and the Slave Trade
Before the fifteenth century, Europeans knew little about Africa beyond its Mediterranean coast, which had been part of the Islamic world since the eighth century. Spain, much of which had been subject to Islamic rule before 1492, had stronger ties to North Africa than did most of Europe. But Christian merchants from other European lands had also traded for centuries with Muslims in the North African ports. When stories of West African gold reached European traders, they tried to move deeper into the continent. But they encountered powerful Muslim merchants intent on monopolizing the gold trade.

In the early fifteenth century, the kingdom of Portugal sought to circumvent this Muslim monopoly. Portuguese forces conquered Ceuta in Morocco and gained a foothold on the continent in 1445. Because this outpost did not pro-
vided direct access to the sources of gold, Portuguese mariners gradually explored the West African coast. They established trading posts along the way, where they exchanged horses, clothing, wine, lead, iron, and steel for African gold, grain, animal skins, cotton, pepper, and camels.

By the 1430s, the Portuguese had discovered perhaps the greatest source of wealth they could extract from Africa—slaves. A vigorous market in African slaves had existed in southern Europe since the middle of the fourteenth century. The expansion of this trade required not only eager buyers of slaves, but also willing suppliers. Chronic underpopulation in many areas had led to the development of slavery within West Africa itself, as a way to maintain control over scarce and valuable laborers. In fact, African law recognized slaves (not land, as in Europe) as the only form of private, revenue-producing property. Most slaves within Africa lost their freedom because they were captured in war, but others had been kidnapped or were enslaved as punishment for a crime. African merchants, familiar with the slave trade at home, saw little reason not to sell unfree laborers to European buyers.

European visitors who observed African slaves in their homeland often described them as “slaves in name only” because they were subject to so little coercion. African slaves at work in the fields appeared little different from other farmers. Slaves might also be employed as soldiers or administrators, fulfilling important duties and enjoying considerable freedom in their daily routines. Slavery in Africa was not necessarily a permanent status and did not automatically apply to the slaves’ children. African merchants who sold slaves to European purchasers had no reason to suspect that those slaves would be treated any differently by their new owners.

Africans caught in the web of the transatlantic slave trade, however, entered a much harsher world. Separated from the kinfolk who meant so much to them, isolated from a familiar landscape, and hard-pressed to sustain spiritual and cultural traditions in a wholly new environment, Africans faced daunting challenges as they entered into the history of the New World.

**WESTERN EUROPE ON THE EVE OF EXPLORATION**

When Columbus sailed from Spain in 1492, he left a continent recovering from the devastating warfare and disease of the fourteenth century and about to embark on the devastating religious conflicts of the sixteenth. Between 1337 and 1453, England and France had exhausted each other in a series of conflicts known as the Hundred Years’ War. And between 1347 and 1351, an epidemic known as the Black Death (bubonic plague, and perhaps in some areas a pneumonic form of the disease as well) wreaked havoc on a European population already suffering from persistent malnutrition. Perhaps a third of all Europeans died, with results that were felt for more than a century.

The plague left Europe with far fewer workers, a result that contributed to southern Europeans’ interest in the African slave trade. To help the economy recover, the survivors learned to be more efficient and rely on technological improvements. Farmers selected the most fertile land to till, and artisans adopted labor-saving techniques to increase productivity. Metalworkers built larger furnaces with huge bellows driven by water power. Shipbuilders re-designed vessels with steering mechanisms that could be managed by smaller crews. Innovations in banking, accounting, and insurance also fostered economic recovery. Prosperity was distributed unevenly among social classes, however. In parts of England, France, Sweden, and the German states, peasants and workers protested rising rents and taxes that threatened to absorb most of their wages. Yet on the whole, Europe had a stronger, more productive economy in 1500 than ever before.

In much of Western Europe, economic improvement encouraged an extraordinary cultural movement known as the Renaissance, a “rebirth” of interest in the classical civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome. The Renaissance originated in the city-states of Italy, where a prosperous and educated urban class promoted learning and artistic expression. Wealthy townspeople joined princes in becoming patrons of the arts, offering financial support to painters, sculptors, architects, writers, and musicians.

The daily lives of most Europeans, however, remained untouched by intellectual and artistic developments. Most Europeans were peasants living in agricultural communities that often differed in important ways from Native American and West African societies. In European societies, men performed most of the heavy work of farming, while women’s labors focused on caring for the family and domestic duties. Europeans lived in states organized into more rigid hierarchies than could be found in many (though not all) parts of North America or West Africa, with the population divided into distinct classes. At the top were the monarchs who, along with the next rank of aristocrats, dominated government and owned most of the land, receiving rents and labor services from peasants and rural artisans. Next, in descending order, came prosperous gentry families, independent landowners, and, at the bottom, landless peasants and laborers.

European society was also patriarchal, with men dominating political and economic life. Europe’s rulers were, with few exceptions, men, and men controlled the
Catholic Church. Inheritance was patrilineal, and only men could own property. According to an ideal not always upheld, Europeans thought that even the poorest man should be “as a king in his own house,” ruling over his wife, children, and servants.

The Consolidation of Political and Military Authority

By the end of the fifteenth century, after more than a hundred years of incessant conflict, a measure of stability returned to the countries about to embark on overseas expansion. Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Louis XI of France, and Henry VII of England successfully asserted royal authority over their previously fragmented realms, creating strong state bureaucracies to control political rivals. They gave special trading privileges to merchants to gain their support, creating links that would later prove important in financing overseas expeditions. At the same time, Spain and Portugal negotiated an end to a long-running dispute about the succession to the throne of Castile, one of Spain’s largest kingdoms.

The consolidation of military power went hand in hand with the strengthening of political authority. Portugal developed a strong navy to defend its seaborne merchants. Louis XI of France commanded a standing army, and Ferdinand of Spain created a palace guard to use against potential opponents. Before overseas expansion began, European monarchs exerted military force to extend their authority closer to home. Louis XI and his successors used warfare and intermarriage with the ruling families of nearby provinces to extend French influence. In the early sixteenth century, England’s Henry VIII sent soldiers to conquer Ireland. And the Spain of 1492 was forged from the successful conclusion of the reconquista (“reconquest”) of territory from Muslim control.

Muslim invaders from North Africa first entered Spain in 711 and ruled much of the Iberian peninsula (which includes Spain and Portugal) for centuries. Beginning in the mid-eleventh century, Christian armies embarked on a long effort to reclaim the region. By 1450, only the southern tip of Spain remained under Muslim control. After the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1469 united Spain’s two principal kingdoms, their combined forces completed the reconquista. Granada, the last Muslim stronghold, fell in 1492, shortly before Columbus set out on his first voyage.

Religious Conflict and the Protestant Reformation

Even as these rulers sought to unify their realms, religious conflicts began to tear Europe apart. For more than a thousand years, Catholic Christianity had united Western Europeans in one faith. All Christians believed that God had sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to suffer crucifixion, die, and rise from the dead in order to redeem humans from sin and give them eternal life. The Catholic Church built on this faith included an elaborate hierarchy of clergy, ranging upward from parish priests to bishops, archbishops, and cardinals, culminating in Christ’s representative on earth, the pope.

By the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church had accumulated enormous wealth and power. The pope wielded influence not only as a spiritual leader but also as the political ruler of parts of Italy. The church owned considerable property throughout Europe. In reaction to this growing influence, many Christians, especially in Northern Europe, began to criticize the popes and the church itself for worldliness, abuse of power, and betrayal of the legacy of Christ.

In 1517, a German monk, Martin Luther, invited open debate on a set of
propositions critical of church practices and doctrines. Luther believed that the church had become too insistent on the performance of good works, such as charitable donations or other actions intended to please God. He called for a return to what he understood to be the purer practices and beliefs of the early church, emphasizing that salvation came not by good deeds but only by faith in God. With the help of the newly invented printing press, his ideas spread widely, inspiring a challenge to the Catholic Church that came to be known as the Reformation.

When the Catholic Church refused to compromise, Luther and other critics withdrew to form their own religious organizations. Luther emphasized the direct, personal relationship of God to the individual believer. He urged people to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth by reading the Bible, which he translated for the first time into German. What started as a religious movement, however, quickly acquired an important political dimension.

Sixteenth-century Germany was a fragmented region of small kingdoms and principalities jealous of their independence. They were officially part of a larger Catholic political entity known as the Holy Roman Empire, but many German princes were discontented with imperial authority. Realizing that religious protest reinforced their claims to independence, many princes supported Luther for spiritual and secular reasons. When the Holy Roman Empire under Charles V (who was also king of Spain) tried to silence them, the reformist princes protested. From that point on, these princes—and all Europeans who supported religious reform—became known as Protestants.

The Protestant movement took a more radical turn under the influence of the French reformer John Calvin, who emphasized the doctrine of predestination. Calvin maintained that an all-powerful and all-knowing God chose at the moment of creation which humans would be saved and which would be damned. Each person's fate is thus foreordained, or predestined, by God, although we cannot know our fate during our lifetimes. Good Calvinists struggled to behave as God's chosen, continually searching their souls for evidence of divine grace.

Calvin founded a religious community consistent with his principles in Geneva, a Swiss city-state near the French border. Men who claimed to be “saints,” or God's chosen people, led the city's government. They drove out nonbelievers, subjected all citizens to a rigid discipline, and made Geneva the center of Protestant reform in Europe. But neither Lutherans nor Calvinists could contain the powerful Protestant impulse. In succeeding years, other groups formed, split, and split again, increasing Europe's religious fragmentation.

From Germany and Geneva the Protestant Reformation spread to France, the Netherlands, England, and Hungary. The new religious ideas particularly interested literate city-dwellers, such as merchants and skilled artisans, who were attracted to Protestant writings as well as the sermons of Protestant preachers. Peasants adopted the new ideas more slowly, although German peasants, claiming Luther as inspiration, staged an unsuccessful revolt against their masters in 1524. Luther disavowed them, however, and supported the German princes in their brutal suppression of the revolt.

This 1568 woodcut of a European print shop shows workers setting type in the background, while the men in front print pages for a book. The invention of the printing press revolutionized European society, making information accessible to anyone who could read. During the Reformation, both Protestants and Catholics used the press to spread their views and attack their opponents.
Protestantism, while others, including England and the Netherlands, embraced religious reform.

CONTACT

Religious fervor, political ambition, and the desire for wealth propelled European nations into overseas expansion as well as conflict at home. Portugal, Spain, France, and England competed to establish footholds on other continents in an intense scramble for riches and dominance. The success of these early endeavors was a reflection of Europe’s prosperity and of a series of technological breakthroughs that enabled its mariners to navigate beyond familiar waters.

By 1600, Spain had emerged as the apparent winner among the European competitors for New World dominance. Its astonishingly wealthy empire included vast territories in Central and South America. The conquerors of this empire attributed their success to their military superiority and God’s approval of their imperial ambitions. In reality, it was the result of a complex set of interactions with native peoples as well as an unanticipated demographic catastrophe.

The Lure of Discovery

The potential rewards of overseas exploration captured the imaginations of a small but powerful segment of European society. Most people, busy making a living, cared little about distant lands. But certain princes and merchants anticipated spiritual and material benefits from voyages of discovery. The spiritual advantages included making new Christian converts and blocking Islam’s expansion—a Christian goal that dated back to the eleventh-century Crusades against the Muslims in the Middle East and continued with the reconquista. On the material side, the voyages would contribute to Europe’s prosperity by increasing trade.

Merchants especially sought access to Asian spices like pepper, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg that added interest to an otherwise monotonous diet and helped preserve certain foods. Wealthy Europeans paid handsomely for small quantities of spices, making it worthwhile to transport them great distances. But the overland spice trade—and the trade in other luxury goods such as silk and furs—spanned thousands of miles, involved many middlemen, and was controlled at key points by Muslim merchants. One critical center was Constantinople, the bastion of Christianity in the eastern Mediterranean. When that city fell to the Ottomans—the Muslim rulers of Turkey—in 1453, Europeans feared that caravan routes to Asia would be disrupted. This encouraged merchants to turn westward and seek alternative routes.

The reorientation of European trade benefited western Italian cities such as Genoa as well as Portugal and Spain, whose ports gave access to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. Mariners ventured farther into ocean waters, seeking direct access to the African gold trade and, eventually, a sea route around Africa to Asia. Had it not been for a set of technological developments that reduced the risks of ocean sailing, such lengthy voyages into unexplored areas would have been impossible.

Advances in navigation and shipbuilding. Ocean voyages required sturdier ships than those that plied the Mediterranean. Because oceangoing mariners traveled beyond sight of coastal features, they also needed reliable navigational tools. In the early fifteenth century, Prince Henry of Portugal, excited by the idea of overseas discovery, sponsored the efforts of shipbuilders, mapmakers, and other workers to solve these practical problems. By 1500, enterprising artisans had made several important advances. Iberian shipbuilders perfected the caravel, a ship whose narrow shape and steering rudder suited it for ocean travel. Ship designers combined square sails (good for speed) with triangular lateen sails, which increased maneuverability. European mariners eagerly adopted two important navigational devices—the magnetic compass (first developed in China) and the astrolabe (introduced to Europe by Muslims from Spain), which allowed mariners to determine their position in relation to a star’s known location in the sky. As sailors acquired practical experience on the high seas, mapmakers recorded their observations of landfalls, wind patterns, and ocean currents.

After Portugal’s conquest of the Moroccan city of Ceuta in 1415, its mariners slowly worked their way along Africa’s western coast, establishing trading posts where they exchanged European goods for gold, ivory, and slaves (see Map 1–3). Bartolomeu Dias reached the southern tip of Africa in 1488. Eleven years later, Vasco da Gama brought a Portuguese fleet around Africa to India, opening a sea route to Asia. These initiatives gave Portugal a virtual monopoly on Far Eastern trade for some time.

The Atlantic islands and the slave trade. The new trade routes gave strategic importance to the islands that lie in the Atlantic off the west coast of Africa and Europe. Spain and Portugal vied for control of the Canary Islands, located 800 miles southwest of the Iberian peninsula. Spain eventually prevailed in 1496 by defeating the islands’ inhabitants. Portugal acquired Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands, along with a group of tiny islands off Africa’s Guinea Coast.

Sugar, like Asian spices, commanded high prices in Europe, so the conquerors of the Atlantic islands began to cultivate sugar cane on them, on large plantations worked by slave labor. In the Canaries, the Spanish first enslaved the native inhabitants. When disease and exhaustion
During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Europeans embarked on voyages of discovery that carried them to both Asia and the Americas. Portugal dominated the ocean trade with Asia for most of this period. In the New World, reports of Spain's acquisition of vast wealth soon led France and England to attempt to establish their own territorial claims.
reduced their numbers, the Spanish brought in African slaves, often purchased from Portuguese traders. On uninhabited islands, the Europeans imported African slaves from the start. São Tomé and the other small islands off the Guinea Coast eventually became important way stations in the transatlantic slave trade.

Christopher Columbus and the Westward Route to Asia

Christopher Columbus was but one of many European mariners excited by the prospect of tapping into the wealth of Asia. Born in Genoa in 1451, he later lived in Portugal and Spain, where he read widely in geographical treatises and listened closely to the stories and rumors that circulated among mariners. As a young man Columbus gained considerable experience with ocean travel, visiting Africa’s Guinea Coast and Madeira, and perhaps even voyaging to Iceland.

He was not, however, the first European to believe that he could reach Asia by sailing westward. The idea developed logically during the fifteenth century as mariners gained knowledge and experience from their exploits in the Atlantic and around Africa. Most Europeans knew that the world was round, but scoffed at the idea of a westward voyage to Asia in the belief that no ship could carry enough provisions for such a long trip. Columbus’s confidence that he could succeed grew from a mathematical error. He mistakenly calculated the earth's circumference as 18,000 (rather than 24,000) miles and so concluded that Asia lay just 3,500 miles west of the Canary Islands. Columbus first sought financial support for a westward voyage from the king of Portugal, whose advisers disputed his calculations and warned him that he would starve at sea before reaching Asia. Undaunted, he turned to Portugal’s rival, Spain.

Columbus tried to convince Ferdinand and Isabella that his plan suited Spain’s national goals. If he succeeded, Spain could grow rich from Asian trade, send Christian missionaries to Asia (a goal in keeping with the religious ideals of the *reconquista*), and perhaps enlist the Great Khan of China as an ally in the long struggle with Islam. If he failed, the “enterprise of the Indies” would cost little. The Spanish monarchs nonetheless kept Columbus waiting nearly seven years—until 1492, when the last Muslim stronghold at Granada fell to Spanish forces—before they gave him their support.

After thirty-three days at sea, Columbus and his men reached the Bahamas, probably landing on what is now called Watling Island. They spent four months exploring the Caribbean and visiting several islands, including Hispaniola (now the site of Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and Cuba. Although puzzled by his failure to find the fabled cities of China and Japan, Columbus believed that he had reached Asia. Three more voyages, between 1493 and 1504, however, failed to yield clear evidence of an Asian landfall or samples of Asian riches. Columbus reported that the islands he encountered contained “great mines of gold and other metals” and spices in abundance, yet all he brought back to Isabella and Ferdinand were strange plants and animals, some gold ornaments, and several kidnapped Taino Indians.

Obsessed with the wealth he had promised himself and others, Columbus and his men turned violent, sacking the villages of the Tainos and Caribs and demanding tribute in gold. The Spanish forced gangs of Indians to pan rivers for the precious nuggets. But Caribbean gold reserves, found mainly on Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, were not extensive. Dissatisfied with the meager results, Columbus sought other sources of wealth.

In 1494, Columbus suggested to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain that the Indies could yield a profit if islanders were sold as slaves. The Tainos and other native peoples, he wrote, were “very savage and suitable for the purpose.” His plan earned him a sharp rebuke from Queen
Isabella, who opposed enslaving people she considered to be new Spanish subjects. This royal fastidiousness was short-lived, however. Within a year, the queen agreed that native war captives could be enslaved. In succeeding decades, the Spanish government periodically called for fair treatment of Indians and prohibited their enslavement, but such measures were easily ignored by colonists on the other side of the Atlantic.

Columbus died in Spain in 1506, still convinced he had found Asia. What he had done was to set in motion a process that would transform both sides of the Atlantic. It would eventually bring wealth to many Europeans and immense suffering to Native Americans and Africans.

The Spanish Conquest and Colonization

Of all European nations, Spain was best suited to take advantage of Columbus’s discovery. Its experience with the reconquista gave it both a religious justification for conquest (bringing Christianity to nonbelievers) and an army of seasoned soldiers—conquistadores—eager to seek their fortunes in America now that the last Muslims had been expelled from Spain. In addition, during the reconquista and the conquest of the Canary Islands, Spain’s rulers had developed efficient techniques for controlling newly conquered lands that could be applied to New World colonies.

The Spanish first consolidated their control of the Caribbean, establishing outposts on Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica (see Map 1–4). The conquistadores were more interested in finding gold and slaves than in creating permanent settlements. Leaving a trail of destruction, they attacked native villages and killed or captured the inhabitants. By 1524, the Taínos had all but died out; the Caribs survived on more isolated islands until the eighteenth century. Spanish soldiers then ventured to the mainland. Juan Ponce de León led an expedition to Florida in 1513. In that same year, Vasco Núñez de Balboa arrived in Central America, crossing the isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean.

The end of the Aztec Empire. In 1519, Hernán Cortés and six hundred soldiers—the light-skinned strangers who inspired the Indian messenger to rush to Moctezuma—landed on the coast of Mexico. Their subsequent actions more than fulfilled the Aztec king’s belief that the Spaniards’ arrival was an evil omen. “I and my companions,” Cortés announced, “suffer from a disease of the heart which can be cured only with gold.” By 1521, Cortés and his men had conquered the powerful Aztec empire. The Spanish soldiers also discovered riches beyond their wildest dreams. They “picked up the gold and fingered it like monkeys,” reported one Aztec witness. They were “transported by joy, as if their hearts were illumined and made new.”

The swift, decisive Spanish victory depended on several factors. In part, the Spanish enjoyed certain technological advantages. Their guns and horses often enabled them to overwhelm larger
groups of Aztec foot soldiers armed with spears and wooden swords edged with obsidian. But technology alone cannot account for the conquest of a vastly more numerous enemy, capable of absorbing far higher losses in combat.

Cortés benefited from two other factors. First, he exploited divisions within the Aztec empire. The Spanish acquired indispensable allies among subject Indians who represented Aztec domination, tribute demands, and seizure of captives for religious sacrifice. Cortés received invaluable help in communicating with these peoples from Malinche, a captive native woman who served as a translator (and who also bore him a son). He eventually gained 200,000 Indian allies eager to throw off Aztec rule.

A second and more important factor was disease. One of Cortés’s men was infected with smallpox, which soon

MAP 1–4  Spanish, English, and French Settlements in North America in the Sixteenth Century

By the end of the sixteenth century, only Spain had established permanent settlements in North America. French outposts in Canada and at Fort Caroline, as well as the English settlement at Roanoke, failed to thrive. European rivalries for North America, however, would intensify after 1600.
devastated the native population. European diseases had been unknown in the Americas before 1492, and Indians lacked resistance to them. Historians estimate that nearly 40 percent of the inhabitants of central Mexico died of smallpox within a year. Other diseases followed, including typhus, measles, and influenza. By 1600, the population of Mexico may have declined from over 15 million to less than a million people.

Aztec society and culture collapsed in the face of appalling mortality. “The illness was so dreadful,” one survivor recalled, “that no one could walk or move. The sick were so utterly helpless that they could only lie on their beds like corpses, unable to move their limbs or even their heads. . . . If they did move their bodies, they screamed with pain.” The epidemic ravaged families, wiped out whole villages, and destroyed traditional political authority. Early in their bid to gain control of the Aztec empire, the Spanish seized Moctezuma, and eventually put him to death. They did not have to kill his successor, however, for he died of disease less than three months after gaining the throne.

The fall of the Inca Empire. In 1532, Francisco Pizarro and 180 men, following rumors of even greater riches than those of Mexico, discovered the Inca empire high in the Peruvian Andes. It was the largest empire in the Americas, stretching more than 2,000 miles from what is now Ecuador to Chile. An excellent network of roads and bridges linked this extensive territory to the imperial capital of Cuzco. Economically prosperous from trade and agricultural production based on complex irrigation systems, the empire was also prone to political division. The Spaniards arrived at a moment of weakness for the empire. A few years before, the Inca ruler had died, probably from smallpox, and civil war had broken out between two of his sons. The victor, Atahualpa, was on his way from the

In this illustration from a Spanish monk's history of the Aztecs, Moctezuma observes a comet plummeting toward the earth, an omen that he believed presaged disaster for his people. The appearance of the comet coincided with the first reports of white-skinned strangers arriving on the coast of Mexico.
empire’s northern provinces to claim his throne in Cuzco when Pizarro intercepted him. Pizarro took Atahualpa hostage and despite receiving a colossal ransom—a roomful of gold and silver—had him killed. The Spaniards then captured Cuzco, eventually extended control over the whole empire, and established a new capital at Lima.

By 1550, Spain’s New World empire stretched from the Caribbean through Mexico to Peru. It was administered from Spain by the Council of the Indies, which enacted laws for the empire and supervised an elaborate bureaucracy charged with their enforcement. The council aimed to project royal authority into every village in New Spain in order to maintain political control and extract as much wealth as possible from the land and its people.

For more than a century, Spanish ships crossed the Atlantic carrying seemingly limitless amounts of treasure from the colonies. To extract this wealth, the colonial rulers subjected the native inhabitants of New Spain to compulsory tribute payments and forced labor. Tens of thousands of Indians toiled in silver mines in Peru and Bolivia and on sugar plantations in the Caribbean. When necessary, Spaniards imported African slaves to supplement a native labor force ravaged by disease and exhaustion.

Spanish incursions to the north. The desire for gold eventually lured Spaniards farther into North America. In 1528, an expedition to Florida ended in disaster when the Spanish intruders provoked an attack by Apalachee Indians. Most of the Spanish survivors eventually perished, but Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and three other men (including an African slave) escaped from their captors and managed to reach Mexico after a grueling eight-year journey. In a published account of his ordeal, Cabeza de Vaca insisted that the interior of North America contained a fabulously wealthy empire (see “American Views: Cabeza de Vaca among the Indians”).

This report inspired other Spaniards to seek the treasures that had eluded its author. In 1539, Hernán de Soto—who tried unsuccessfully to get Cabeza de Vaca to serve as a guide—led an expedition from Florida to the Mississippi River. Along the way, the Spaniards harassed the native peoples, demanding provisions, burning villages, and capturing women to be servants and concubines. De Soto, who reportedly enjoyed “the sport of hunting Indians on horseback,” ordered natives who resisted him to be mutilated, thrown to dogs, or burned alive. He and his men also exposed the Indians to deadly European diseases. Although weakened by native resistance, the expedition kept up its rampage for three years, turning toward Mexico only after de Soto died in 1542. In these same years, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado led three hundred troops on an equally destructive expedition through present-day Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado on a futile search for the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola, rumored to contain hoards of gold and precious stones.

The failure to find gold and silver halted Spain’s attempt to extend its empire to the north. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish maintained just two precarious footholds north of Mexico. One was at St. Augustine, on Florida’s Atlantic coast. Founded in 1565, this fortified outpost served as a naval base to defend Spanish treasure fleets from raids by English and French privateers. The other settlement was located far to the west in what is now New Mexico. Juan de Oñate, on a futile search for silver mines, claimed the region for Spain in 1598. He and his men proceeded to antagonize the area’s inhabitants. In one surprise attack, the Spaniards destroyed the ancient town of Acoma, killing or enslaving most of the residents. Having earned the enmity of the Pueblo people—astonishing even his own superiors with his brutality—Oñate barely managed to keep his tiny colony together.

Almost from the start of the conquest, the bloody tactics of men such as Oñate aroused protest back in Spain. The Indians’ most eloquent advocate was Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican priest shamed by his own role (as a layman) in the conquest of Hispaniola. In 1516, the Spanish king appointed him to the newly created office of Protector of the Indians, but his efforts had little effect. To publicize the horrors he saw, Las Casas wrote In Defense of the Indians, including graphic descriptions of native sufferings. Instead of eliciting Spanish reforms, however, his work inspired Protestant Europeans to create the “Black Legend,” an exaggerated story according to which a fanatical Catholic Spain sought to spread its control at any cost.

The seeds of economic decline. Meanwhile, the vast riches of Central and South America glutted Spain’s treasury. Between 1500 and 1650, an estimated 181 tons of gold and 16,000 tons of silver were shipped from the New World to Spain, making it the richest and most powerful state in Europe (see Figure 1–1). But this influx of American treasure had unforeseen consequences that would soon undermine Spanish predominance.

In 1492, the Spanish crown, determined to impose religious conformity after the reconquista, expelled from Spain all Jews who refused to become Christians. The refugees included many leading merchants who had contributed significantly to Spain’s economy. The remaining Christian merchants, now awash in American riches, saw little reason to invest in new trade or productive enterprises that might have sustained the economy once the flow of New World treasure diminished. As a result, Spain’s economy eventually stagnated.

Compounding the problem, the flood of American gold and silver inflated prices throughout Europe, hurting both workers, whose wages failed to rise as fast, and aristo-
developed some immunity to them. Native Americans, lacking such contact, had not. The Black Death of 1347–1351, Europe’s worst epidemic, killed perhaps a third of its population. Epidemics of smallpox, measles, typhus, and influenza struck Native Americans with far greater force, killing half, and sometimes as many as 90 percent, of the people in communities exposed to them. The only American disease that may have infected Old World populations was a sexually transmitted form of syphilis, which appeared in Spain just after Columbus returned from his first voyage.

Another important aspect of the Columbian exchange was the introduction of Old World livestock to the New World, which began when Columbus brought horses, sheep, cattle, pigs, and goats with him on his second voyage in 1493. Native Americans had few domesticated animals of their own (mainly dogs, and, in the Peruvian Andes, llamas and alpacas). The large European beasts created problems as well as opportunities for native peoples. With few natural predators to limit their numbers, livestock populations boomed in the New World, competing with native mammals for grazing. At least at first, the Indians’ unfamiliarity with the use of horses in warfare often gave mounted European soldiers a decisive military advantage. But some native groups adopted these animals for their own purposes. Yaquis, Pueblos, and other peoples in the Southwest began to raise cattle and sheep. By the eighteenth century, Plains Indians had reoriented their culture around the use of horses, which had become essential for travel, hunting buffalo, and carrying burdens. Horses also became a primary object for trading and raiding among Plains peoples.

European ships carried unintentional passengers as well. The black rat, a carrier of disease, arrived on the first voyages. So did insects, including honeybees, previously unknown in the New World. Ships also brought weeds such as thistles and dandelions, whose seeds were often embedded in hay for animal fodder.

Europeans brought a variety of seeds and plants in order to grow familiar foods. Columbus’s men planted wheat, chickpeas, melons, onions, and fruit trees on Caribbean islands. Europeans also learned to cultivate native foods, such as corn, tomatoes, squash, beans, and potatoes, as well as nonfood plants such as tobacco and

**Figure 1–1 Value of New World Treasure Imported into Spain, 1506–1655**

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Spain was the only European power to reap great wealth from North America. The influx of New World treasure, however, slowed the development of Spain’s economy in the long run. (Note: A ducat was a gold coin.)

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca came to the New World in 1527 in search of riches, not suffering. But the Spanish expedition of which he was a member met disaster shortly after it arrived in Florida on a mission to conquer the region north of the Gulf of Mexico. Of an original group of three hundred soldiers, only Cabeza de Vaca and three other men (including one African slave) survived. They did so by walking thousands of miles overland from the Gulf Coast to northern Mexico, an eight-year-long ordeal that tested the men's wits and physical endurance. Instead of entering Indian villages as proud conquistadors, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions encountered native peoples from a position of weakness. In order to survive, they had to adapt to the ways of the peoples across whose land they passed. After Cabeza de Vaca made it back to Mexico City, he described his experiences in an official report to the king of Spain. This remarkable document offers vivid descriptions of the territory extending from northern Florida to northern Mexico and the many peoples who inhabited it. It is equally interesting, as this extract suggests, for what it reveals about Cabeza de Vaca himself and the changes he made in the interest of survival.

- While living among the Capoques, what sort of work did Cabeza de Vaca have to do, and why?
- Why did Cabeza de Vaca decide to become a merchant? What advantages did this way of life offer him?
- Why did the Indians welcome Cabeza de Vaca into their communities even though he was a stranger?

[remained with the Capoques] for more than a year, and because of the great labors they forced me to perform and the bad treatment they gave me, I resolved to flee from them and go to those who live in the forests and on the mainland, who are called those of Charruco, because I was unable to endure the life that I had with these others; because among many other tasks, I had to dig the roots to eat out from under the water and among the rushes where they grew in the ground. And because of this, my fingers were so worn that when a reed touched them it caused them to bleed, and the reeds cut me in many places. . . . And because of this, I set to the task of going over to the others, and with them things were somewhat better for me. And because I became a merchant, I tried to exercise the vocation as best I knew how. And because of this they gave me food to eat and treated me well, and they importuned me to go from one place to another to obtain the things they needed, because on account of the continual warfare in the land, there is little traffic or communication among them. And with my dealings and wares I entered inland as far as I desired, and I went along the coast for forty or fifty leagues. The mainstay of my trade was pieces of snail shell and the hearts of them; and conch shells with which they cut a fruit that is like frijoles [beans], with which they perform cures and do their dances and make celebrations. . . . And in exchange and as barter for it, I brought forth hides and red ocher with which they smear themselves and dye their faces and hair, flints to make the points of arrows, paste, and stiff canes to make them, and some tassels made from deer hair which they dye red. And this occupation served me well, because practicing it, I had the freedom to go wherever I wanted, and I was not constrained in any way nor enslaved, and wherever I went they treated me well and gave me food out of want for my wares, and most importantly because doing that, I was able to seek out the way by which I would go forward. And among them I was very well known; when they saw me and I brought them the things they needed, they were greatly pleased.

Cultural Perceptions and Misperceptions

For thousands of years, Indian and European societies developed in isolation from one another. When members of these societies met for the first time, confusion inevitably resulted. Even simple transactions produced unexpected results. When Columbus showed swords to Caribbean islanders, for example, “they took them by the edge and through ignorance cut themselves” because they had never touched metal weapons. The first Indians whom Cortés allowed aboard a Spanish ship fainted at the sound of a large cannon being fired. French explorers were similarly taken by surprise when they choked while smoking Iroquois tobacco, which they thought tasted like “powdered pepper.” These were relatively minor mishaps and were soon overshadowed by more substantial interactions which seemed to exaggerate the differences between Indians and Europeans.

Religion was extremely important to both Native Americans and Europeans, but differences in forms and practices encouraged misunderstandings. Most Indians believed that the universe contained friendly and hostile spiritual forces in human and other-than-human forms (such as plants, animals, and stars). People interacted with the spirit world...
through ceremonies that often involved exchanging gifts and performing certain rituals. North of Mexico, Indians passed on religious beliefs through oral traditions, not in writing. To Europeans accustomed to worshipping one God in an organized church and preserving their beliefs in a written Bible, Indian traditions were incomprehensible. When Columbus noted that the Taínos had no churches, he concluded that “I do not detect in them any religion.” Some Europeans, including Cortés, went further, assuming that Indians worshiped the Devil. Indians, in turn, often found Christianity confusing and at first rejected European pressure to convert. As some Iroquois explained to colonists, “We do not know that God, we have never seen him, we know not who he is.”

Different understandings of the roles of men and women provided another source of confusion. Europeans assumed that men were naturally superior to women and should dominate them and rule society. They disapproved of the less rigid gender divisions among Native American peoples. Wampanoags and Powhatans sometimes accepted female leaders, for instance, and Huron women helped to select male chiefs. Many Indian societies, including the Pueblos, Hurons, and Iroquois, were matrilineal, tracing descent through the mother’s family instead of the father’s, as Europeans did. In matrilineal societies, married couples lived with the wife’s family, children inherited property from their mother’s brother, and rulers succeeded to their positions through their mother’s family line. Europeans, accustomed to societies in which men did most agricultural work, also objected to Indian women’s dominant role in farming and assumed that men’s hunting was more for recreation than subsistence. They often concluded that Indian women lived “a most slavish life.” Indians, in turn, sometimes thought that European men failed to make good use of their wives. In Massachusetts, some native men ridiculed colonists “for spoiling good working creatures” by not making their women work in the fields.

These were some of the many cultural differences that separated Indian and European societies. In order for natives and newcomers to get along peaceably with each other, each side would have to adapt to the new circumstances under which both groups now lived. At first, such harmony seemed possible. Columbus initially reported that the Taínos Indians “became so much our friends that it was a marvel.” But it soon became clear that Europeans intended to dominate the lands they discovered. Only three days after he arrived in America, Columbus announced his intention “not to pass by any island of which I did not take possession” and soon speculated on the possibility of enslaving Indians. Such claims to dominance sparked vigorous resistance from native peoples everywhere who strove to maintain their autonomy in a changed world.

COMPETITION FOR A CONTINENT

Spain’s New World bonanza attracted the attention of other European states eager to share in the wealth. Portugal soon acquired its own profitable piece of South America. In 1494, the conflicting claims of Portugal and Spain were resolved by the Treaty of Tordesillas. The treaty drew a north–south line approximately 1,100 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands. Spain received all lands west of the line, while Portugal held sway to the east. This limited Portugal’s New World empire to Brazil, where settlers followed the precedent of the Atlantic island colonies and established sugar plantations worked by slave labor. But the treaty also protected Portugal’s claims in Africa and Asia, which lay east of the line.

France and England, of course, rejected the granting of the Western Hemisphere to Spain and Portugal. Their initial challenges to Spanish dominance in the New World, however, proved quite feeble. Domestic troubles—largely sparked by the Protestant Reformation—distracted the two countries from the pursuit of empire. By the close of the sixteenth century, both France and England insisted on their rights to New World lands, but neither had created a permanent settlement to support its claim.

Early French Efforts in North America

France was a relative latecomer to New World exploration. In 1494, French troops invaded Italy, beginning a long and ultimately unsuccessful war with the Holy Roman Empire. Preoccupied with European affairs, France’s rulers paid little attention to America. But when news of Cortés’s exploits in Mexico arrived in the 1520s, King Francis I wanted his own New World empire to enrich France and block further Spanish expansion. In 1524, Francis sponsored a voyage by Giovanni da Verrazano, an Italian navigator, who mapped the North American coast from present-day South Carolina to Maine. During the 1530s and 1540s, the French mariner Jacques Cartier made three voyages in search of rich mines to rival those of Mexico and Peru. He explored the St. Lawrence River up to what is now Montreal, hoping to discover a water route through the continent to Asia (the so-called Northwest Passage).

On his third voyage, in 1541, Cartier was to serve under the command of a nobleman, Jean-François de la Rocque, Sieur de Roberval, who was commissioned by the king to establish a permanent settlement in Canada. Troubles in recruiting colonists delayed Roberval, who—when he finally set sail in 1542—ended up taking convicts as his settlers. Cartier sailed ahead, gathered samples of what he thought were gold and diamonds, and returned to France without Roberval’s permission.
English Attempts in the New World

The English were quicker than the French to stake a claim to the New World but no more successful at colonization. In 1497, King Henry VII sent John Cabot, an Italian mariner, to explore eastern Canada on England's behalf. But neither Henry nor any of his wealthy subjects would invest the funds necessary to follow up on Cabot's discoveries. For nearly half a century, English contact with America was limited to the seasonal voyages of fishermen who lived each summer in Newfoundland, fished offshore, and returned in autumn with ships full of cod.

The lapse in English activity in the New World stemmed from religious troubles at home. Between 1534 and 1558, England changed its official religion several times. King Henry VIII, who had once defended the Catholic Church against its critics, took up the Protestant cause when the pope refused to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. In 1534, Henry declared himself the head of a separate Church of England and seized the Catholic Church's English property. Because many English people sympathized with the Protestant cause, there was relatively little opposition to Henry's actions. But in 1553, Mary—daughter of the spurned Catherine of Aragon—became queen and tried to bring England back to Catholicism. She had nearly three hundred Protestants burned at the stake for their beliefs (earning her the nickname “Bloody Mary”), and many others went into exile in Europe.

After Mary's brief but destructive reign, which ended with her death in 1558, her half-sister Elizabeth, a committed Protestant, became queen. Elizabeth ruled for forty-five years (1558–1603), restoring Protestantism as the state religion, bringing stability to the nation, and renewing England's interest in the New World. She and her subjects saw colonization not only as a way to gain wealth and political advantage but also as a Protestant crusade against Catholic domination.

The Colonization of Ireland. England's first target for colonization, however, was not America but Ireland. Located less than 60 miles west of England and populated by Catholics, Ireland threatened to become a base from which Spain or another Catholic power might invade England. Henry VIII tried, with limited success, to bring the island under English control in the 1530s and 1540s. Elizabeth renewed the attempt in the 1560s with a series of brutal expeditions that destroyed Irish villages and slaughtered the inhabitants. Several veterans of these campaigns later took part in New World colonization and drew on their Irish experience for guidance.

Two aspects of that experience were particularly important. First, the English transferred their assumptions about Irish “savages” to Native Americans. Englishmen in America frequently observed similarities between Indians and the Irish. “When they [the Indians] have their apparel on they look like Irish,” noted one Englishman. “The natives of New England,” he added, “are accustomed to build their houses much like the wild Irish.” Because the English held the “wild Irish” in contempt, these observations encouraged them to scorn the Indians. When Indians resisted their attempts at conquest, the English recalled the Irish example, claiming that native “savagery” required brutal suppression.

Second, the Irish experience influenced English ideas about colonial settlement. English conquerors set up “plantations” surrounded by palisades on seized Irish lands. These plantations were meant to be civilized outposts in a savage land. Their aristocratic owners imported Protestant tenants from England and Scotland to farm the land. Native Irish people, considered too wild to join proper Christian communities, were excluded. English colonists in America followed this precedent when they established plantations that separated English and native peoples.

Expeditions to the New World. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, a notoriously cruel veteran of the Irish campaigns, became fascinated with the idea of New World colonization. He composed a treatise to persuade Queen Elizabeth to support such an endeavor. The queen, who counted Gilbert among her favorite courtiers, authorized several exploratory voyages, including Martin Frobisher's three trips in 1576–1578 in search of the Northwest Passage to Asia. Frobisher failed to find the elusive passage and sent back shiploads of glittering ore that proved to be fool's gold.
FROM THEN TO NOW

The Kennewick Man Controversy

In late July 1996, two men watching a boat race near Kennewick, Washington, discovered a human skull lying at the bottom of the Columbia River. Subsequent searches in the area resulted in the excavation of a nearly complete male skeleton with what appeared to be European features. At first, officials wondered if the remains belonged to a missing person or perhaps a nineteenth-century settler. When investigators found a stone spearpoint embedded in the skeleton’s pelvis, however, they knew that the bones were far older than that. DNA analysis revealed that the skeleton was perhaps as much as 9,500 years old, and must have belonged to an ancient Native American.

Kennewick Man, as the skeleton was named, had lived in the early Archaic Period. The land bridge across the Bering Strait—the route his ancestors presumably followed in coming to North America—had long since disappeared under rising ocean waters. Like his fellow Archaic Indians, he survived by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants. Native peoples in the region also obtained such goods as acorns, salt, and obsidian through trade with Indians living elsewhere in North America. But conflict as well as peaceful exchange marked Kennewick Man’s life, as revealed by the grim evidence of the spearpoint in his hipbone.

Archaeologists generally believe that all Native American peoples descended from Asian ancestors. Yet the shape of Kennewick Man’s skull and face bones bears closer resemblance to European models and differs from known characteristics of other ancient Americans. This presents an unexpected puzzle. Some people have suggested that Kennewick Man was in fact an ancient European who somehow ended up in North America. Others detect similarities between Kennewick Man and the Ainu people, who once lived in coastal Asia but now can be found only in northern Japan—an observation that preserves the theory of Asian descent. Not long after the skeleton was found, controversy arose not only over the origins of the remains, but also how they ought to be treated. Archaeologists and other scientists wanted to subject the bones to further analysis in order to...
solve the puzzle of their origins. But in September, 1996, a group of five Native American tribes claimed the skeleton under the provisions of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). They intended to rebury it, out of respect for their ancestor and in accordance with spiritual traditions. For many years, Native Americans have objected to the way in which archaeologists and amateur scavengers have treated Indian remains as objects to be collected or shipped to museums.

For nine years Kennewick Man has been the subject of a prolonged legal battle, with some people even raising doubts about the skeleton's Native American ancestry as a way of preventing its reburial. The bones currently lie in the Thomas Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture at the University of Washington in Seattle, pending the outcome of a final court decision. It appears that the scientists may have their way. In February 2005, the Army Corps of Engineers embarked on a review of a projected three-phase study of the remains. At the same time, a federal judge denied a request by four Northwest Native American tribes to participate in the project. Although some people regard these latest developments as the triumph of modern science over tradition, the controversy surrounding Kennewick Man cannot be reduced to such simple terms. It instead represents a complex mixture of cultural, ethical, and historical issues. Many Native Americans regard further analysis of Kennewick Man's remains as desecration. They also worry that political rather than scientific motives lie behind efforts to establish the skeleton's possible European origins. Some people might use this hypothesis to argue that Native American claims for historical precedence can be ignored. The Kennewick Man controversy thus opens up a much larger debate on the peopling of the Americas.
Elizabeth had better luck in allowing privateers, such as John Hawkins and Francis Drake, to raid Spanish ships and New World ports for gold and silver. The plunder taken during these raids enriched both the sailors and their investors—one of whom was the queen herself.

Meanwhile, Gilbert continued to promote New World settlement, arguing that it would increase England’s trade and provide a place for the nation’s unemployed people. Like many of his contemporaries, Gilbert believed that England’s “surplus” population threatened social order. The population was indeed growing, and economic changes often made it difficult for people to support themselves. Many landlords, for instance, had been converting farmland into sheep pastures. They profited from the wool trade, but their decision threw tenant families off the land. Gilbert suggested offering free land in America to English families willing to emigrate.

In 1578, Gilbert received permission to set up a colony along the North American coast. It took him five years to organize an expedition to Newfoundland, which he claimed for England. After sailing southward seeking a more favorable site for a colony, Gilbert headed home, only to be lost at sea during an Atlantic storm. The impetus for English colonization did not die with him, however, for his half-brother, Sir Walter Raleigh (another veteran of the Irish wars), took up the cause.

The Roanoke Colony. In 1584, Raleigh sent an expedition to find a suitable location for a colony. Learning that the Carolina coast seemed promising, Raleigh sent men in 1585 to build a settlement on Roanoke Island. Most of the colonists were soldiers fresh from Ireland who refused to grow their own food, insisting that the Roanoke Indians should feed them. When the local chief, Wingina, organized native resistance, they killed him. Eventually, the colonists, disappointed not to have found any treasure and exhausted by a harsh winter, returned to England in 1586.

Two members of these early expeditions, however, left a more positive legacy. Thomas Hariot studied the Roanoke and Croatoan Indians and identified plants and animals in the area, hoping that some might prove to be profitable commodities. John White drew maps and painted a series of watercolors depicting the natives and the coastal landscape. When Raleigh tried once more, in 1587, to found a colony, he chose White to be its leader. This attempt also failed. The ship captain dumped the settlers—who, for the first time, included women and children—on Roanoke Island so that he could pursue Spanish treasure ships. White waited until his granddaughter, Virginia Dare (the first English child born in America), was safely born and then sailed to England for supplies. But the outbreak of war with Spain delayed his return for three years. Spain had gathered an immense fleet to invade England, and all English ships were needed for defense. Although England defeated the Armada in 1588, White could not obtain a relief ship for Roanoke until 1590.
White found the colony deserted. Digging through the ruins of the village, he found “my books torn from the covers, the frames of some of my pictures and Maps rotten and spoilt with rain.” He also saw the word CROATOAN carved on a post and assumed that the colonists had moved to nearby Croatoan Island. But bad weather prevented him from searching there. For years, English and Spanish mariners reported seeing white people along the coast of Chesapeake Bay. But no Roanoke colonists were ever found. They may have moved to the mainland and intermarried with local Indians. One historian has speculated that they survived until 1607 when Powhatan Indians, angered by the appearance of more English settlers, killed them. The actual fate of the “Lost Colony” at Roanoke will probably never be known.

At this point, Raleigh gave up on North America and turned his attention to his Irish plantations. But England’s interest in colonization did not wane. In 1584, Richard Hakluyt had aroused enthusiasm for America by writing the Discourse on the Western Planting for the queen and her advisers. He argued that England would prosper from trade and the sale of New World commodities. Once the Indians were civilized, Hakluyt added, they would eagerly purchase English goods. Equally important, England could plant “sincere religion” (that is, Protestant Christianity) in the New World and block Spanish expansion. Hakluyt’s arguments fired the imaginations of many people, and the defeat of the Spanish Armada emboldened England to challenge Spain’s New World dominance. The experience of Roanoke should have tempered that enthusiasm, illustrating the difficulty of establishing colonies. Roanoke’s fate underscored the need for adequate funding, the unsuitability of soldiers as colonists, and the need to maintain good relations with the Indians. But the English were slow to learn these lessons; when they resumed colonization efforts in 1607, they repeated Roanoke’s mistakes, with disastrous results for the people involved. As it was, the sixteenth century ended with no permanent English settlement in the New World.

**CONCLUSION**

Dramatic changes occurred in North America during the century after Moctezuma’s messenger spotted the Spanish ships. Europeans, eager for wealth and power, set out to claim a continent that just a hundred years earlier they had not dreamed existed. African slaves were brought to the Caribbean, Mexico, and Brazil, and forced to labor under extremely harsh conditions for white masters. The Aztec and Inca empires collapsed in the wake of the Spanish conquest. In the Caribbean and parts of Mexico and Peru, untold numbers of native peoples succumbed to European diseases they had never before encountered.

And yet conditions in 1600 bore clearer witness to the past than to the future. Despite all that had happened, North America was still Indian country. Only Spain had established North American colonies, and even its soldiers struggled to expand north of Mexico. Spain’s outposts in Florida and New Mexico staked claims to territory that it did not really control. Except in Mexico and the Caribbean, Europeans had merely touched the continent’s shores. In 1600, despite the virulent epidemics, native peoples (even in Mexico) still greatly outnumbered European and African immigrants. The next century, however, brought many powerful challenges both to native control and to the Spanish monopoly of settlement.

**Review Questions**

1. How did the Aztecs who first glimpsed Spanish ships off the coast of Mexico describe to Moctezuma what they had seen? What details most captured their attention?

2. Compare men’s and women’s roles in Native American, West African, and European societies. What were the similarities and differences? How did differences between European and Native American gender roles lead to misunderstandings?

3. Many of the first European colonizers in North America were military veterans. What impact did this have on their relations with Indian peoples?

4. Why did Spain so quickly become the dominant colonial power in North America? What advantages did it enjoy over France and England?

5. What role did religion play in early European efforts at overseas colonization? Did religious factors always encourage colonization, or did they occasionally interfere with European expansion?

6. In what ways were trade networks important in linking different groups of people in the Old and New Worlds?
Key Terms

Archaic Period (p. 3)
Aztecs (p. 7)
Cahokia (p. 8)
Columbian Exchange (p. 23)
Culture areas (p. 4)
Great League of Peace and Power (p. 9)

Predestination (p. 15)
Protestants (p. 15)
Reconquista (p. 14)
Reformation (p. 15)
Songhai Empire (p. 10)
Tordesillas, Treaty of (p. 26)

Recommended Reading


Additional Sources

Native American Cultures

West African Society


Europe in the Age of Discovery
Cipolla, Carlo M. Guns, Sails, and Empire: Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion, 1400–1700 (1965).
Scammell, G. V. The First Imperial Age: European Overseas Expansion, c. 1400–1715 (1989).
Conquest and Colonization
De Las Casas, Bartolomé. *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (several editions).

Where to Learn More

- **Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Collinsville, Illinois.** This site, occupied from A.D. 600 to 1500, was the largest Mississippian community in eastern North America. It now includes numerous exhibits, and archaeological excavations continue in the vicinity. The website, [www.siue.edu/CAHOKIAMOUNDS](http://www.siue.edu/CAHOKIAMOUNDS), contains information and photos of archaeological excavations, as well as a link to a virtual tour.

- **Mashantucket Pequot Museum, Mashantucket, Connecticut.** This tribally owned and operated complex offers a view of eastern Woodlands Indian life, focusing on the Pequots of eastern Connecticut. Exhibits include dioramas, films, interactive programs, and a reconstructed sixteenth-century Pequot village. The homepage for the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center is [www.mashantucket.com](http://www.mashantucket.com).

- **Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado.** Occupied by Ancestral Puebloan peoples as early as A.D. 550, the area contains a variety of sites, from early pithouses to spectacular cliff dwellings. The official National Park webpage for Mesa Verde is [www.nps.gov/meve](http://www.nps.gov/meve). Information on individual houses and sites within the park, plus travel and lodging information can be found at [www.mesa.verde.national-park.com](http://www.mesa.verde.national-park.com).

National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C. Part of the Smithsonian Institution in the nation’s capital, this museum contains excellent exhibits on various aspects of Native American history and culture. There is also a branch, the **George Gustav Heye Museum**, in New York City. The website [www.nmai.si.edu](http://www.nmai.si.edu) offers a wealth of information on past and current shows, as well as online exhibitions.

- **St. Augustine, Florida.** Founded in 1565, St. Augustine is the site of the first permanent Spanish settlement in North America. Today the restored community resembles a Spanish colonial town, with narrow, winding streets and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century buildings. The site also contains the restored Castillo de San Marcos, now a national park. The official website for Historic St. Augustine, [www.oldcity.com/his2.html](http://www.oldcity.com/his2.html), provides considerable information about the origins and development of the Spanish settlement.

United States Documents CD-ROM
For primary sources related to this chapter, refer to the document CD-ROM.

[www.prenhall.com/goldfield](http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield)
For study resources related to this chapter, visit the Companion Website.