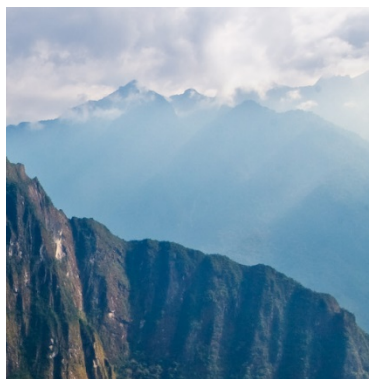
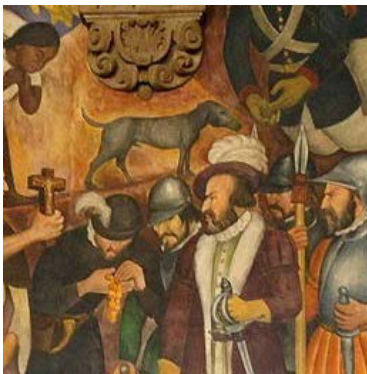




Does might  
make right?





[www.inquiryhistory.com](http://www.inquiryhistory.com)

q u e s t i o n   o n e

# Does might make right?

EXPLORING AMERICA'S HISTORY THROUGH COMPELLING QUESTIONS

## SUPPORTING QUESTIONS

- 1 IS POPULAR CULTURE'S PORTRAYAL OF  
NATIVE AMERICAS AS NOBLE SAVAGES  
ACCURATE?
- 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED  
PLACE IN HISTORY?
- 3 WHY DIDN'T MILLIONS OF NATIVE  
AMERICANS STOP A FEW THOUSAND  
EUROPEAN CONQUERORS?
- 4 WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET  
BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?

D E V E L O P E D   A N D   C O M P I L E D   B Y  
J O N A T H A N   L O O M I S

SOURCES FOR ORIGINAL TEXT INCLUDE  
c o u r s e s . l u m e n l e a r n i n g . c o m  
u s h i s t o r y . o r g  
s a g e a m e r i c a n h i s t o r y . n e t  
l e a r n n c . o r g  
w i k i m e d i a . o r g



CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION  
4.0 INTERNATIONAL LICENSE



q u e s t i o n o n e

# Does might make right?

It is time for you to think about our driving question again. Native American societies, for all their power and diversity did not stop the advance of Europeans intent on establishing their dominance in the New World, and Africans were swept into the colonial epic as slaves, also victims of European power.

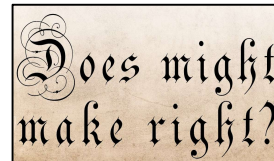
In the end, the exchange between Old World and New remade both the Americas, and Europe, Africa and Asia. Plants, animals, microbes, people and ideas passed across the oceans and irreversibly changed life everywhere.

The Europeans who set off that exchange did not intend to enact all these changes, but they most defiantly intended to use their superior power to affect change that they believed was beneficial to their own interests. And with the exception of a few dissenting voices, like Bartolome de las Casas, most Europeans never doubted the morality of what they were doing.

What do you think? Does might make right?



## 1

**IS POPULAR CULTURE'S PORTRAYAL  
OF NATIVE AMERICANS AS  
NOBLE SAVAGES ACCURATE?****INTRODUCTION**

In Renaissance times, Europeans were not the only ones accomplishing great things. No one can deny the beauty of Michelangelo's brushwork or the brilliance of Shakespeare's verse. But societies elsewhere also flourished. As the 1600s dawned, it seems that each corner of the globe had its own "renaissance." The Native American societies of North America were no different. They had flourishing cultures, arts and languages, much like Europe.

When the Europeans staked their claim in the Americas, they could not have dreamed of the complexity of the peoples they were soon to encounter. In what became the United States, there were, and are still between 140 and 160 different Native American tribes. There is no single Native American language. It would be as difficult for the Mohawk Indians of the East to converse with Zuni Indians of the West as it would be for Germans to converse with Turks.

Medicine was not an unknown science in the Western Hemisphere. Most natural herbs used for medicinal purposes in the modern world had also been used by Native Americans before European contact. Archaeologists have learned that North American Indians made salt by evaporation and mined a great many minerals including copper, lead, and coal.

Despite myths to the contrary, not all Native Americans were peaceful. Like Europe, the American continent faced tribal warfare that sometimes led to human and cultural destruction.

In short, there is no simple way to tell the tale of a continent that had been peopled by diverse communities for thousands of years. Their tales are as complex as any others, their cultures as rich and their knowledge as deep.

And yet, popular culture in the form of movies, television, children's books and advertising often portray Native Americans as noble savages. They are distinct from Europeans or Asians as uncivilized, yet perhaps because they are uncivilized they remain somehow pure and ignorant. The image of Pocahontas from the Disney movie of the same name exemplifies this portrayal. Pocahontas cannot understand the guns the English brought but communicates with the animals and can "paint with all the colors of the wind."



## THE FIRST AMERICANS

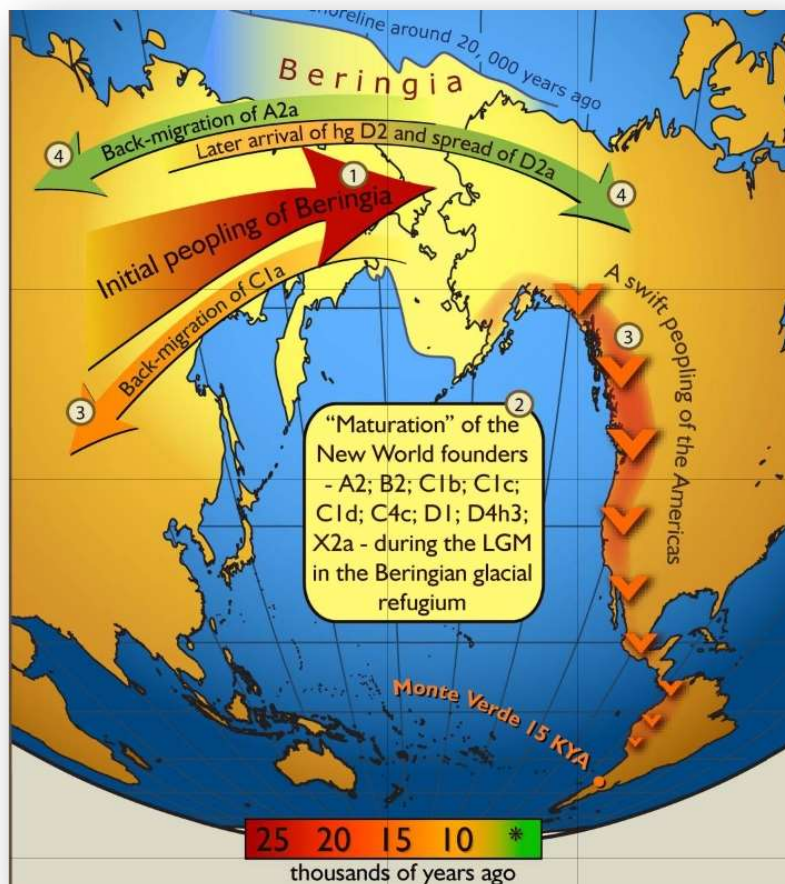
There is general agreement among anthropologists that the ancestors of the first Americans migrated from somewhere in East Asia. DNA studies have found the closest similarities between Native Americans, Mongolian, Amur, Japanese, Korean, and Ainu populations. While America is separated from Asia today by the Bering Sea, it was not always this way. Those Paleolithic hunter-gatherers in Asia first entered North America via the **Bering Land Bridge** which had formed between northeastern Siberia and western Alaska due to the lowering of sea level during the Last Glacial Maximum roughly 20,000 years ago. Of course, the exact dating of such an event, so deep in the past is enormously difficult. There is little archeological evidence, and it is possible that people came and went across the land bridge multiple times as sea levels rose and fell. Regardless of the precise date that humans first stepped foot in the Americas, it was a very long time ago, and by about 14,000 years ago, human populations had expanded all the way to the tip of South America.



**Bering Land Bridge:** The name for the floor of the Bering Sea that was exposed dry land during the period of glaciation. It was crossed by nomads from Asia to North America who became the first Americans.

### Secondary Source: Map

The Bering Land Bridge was an area of the ocean floor that was exposed during the glaciations. Migrating peoples passed from Asia into the Americas. This visual includes genetic data which helped historians recreate the migrations of people between Asian and American.





Just as the cultures of Asia, Europe and Africa are enormously different, so too were the cultures of the Americas. Some build fabulous cities that could have rivaled Rome. Some built pyramids as impressive as those in Egypt. Others, however, never built impressive cities or monuments, but were nomads like the people of the Asian steppe. It is quite difficult to generalize and say anything about the Native Americans without qualifying it by describing the many exceptions to the rule.

It's worth noting that the Americas, that is North and South America together, is a vast place, and the Native American groups that eventually people this expanse of territory were as varied as the people of Europe, Asia and Africa. Not only that, but they changed a great deal over time. There were impressive empires such as the Toltec in what is now Mexico, or the Nazca in South America who had risen, created civilizations, art, monuments, and had then disappeared long before the Europeans crossed the Atlantic in 1492. Logically, this is entirely reasonable. A student of European history studies the Romans and Greeks who built empires and that also rose, thrived and collapsed. Why shouldn't the history of the Americas be the same? Sadly, the reason we know so little today about the ancient civilizations of the New World is that few left a written record. But a lack of written evidence should not leave anyone to conclude that the history of Native America is anything but as diverse and dynamic as the history of any other region of the world.

## MESOAMERICA

Flourishing along the hot Gulf Coast of Mexico from about 1200 to about 400 BCE, the **Olmec** produced a number of major works of art, architecture, pottery, and sculpture. Most recognizable are their giant head sculptures. The Olmec built aqueducts to transport water into their cities and irrigate their fields. They grew maize, squash, beans, and tomatoes. They also bred small domesticated dogs which, along with fish, provided their protein. Although no one knows what happened to the Olmec after about 400 BCE, in part because the jungle reclaimed many of their cities, their culture was the base upon which the later Maya and the Aztec cultures were built. It was the Olmec who worshipped a rain god, a maize god, and the feathered serpent so important in the future pantheons of the Aztecs (who called him **Quetzalcoatl**) and the Maya (to whom he was Kukulcan). The Olmec also developed a system of trade throughout **Mesoamerica**, giving rise to an elite class.

## THE WORLD OF THE MAYA

After the decline of the Olmec, a city rose in the fertile central highlands of Mesoamerica. One of the largest population centers in pre-Columbian America and home to more than 100,000 people at its height in about 500 CE, **Teotihuacan** was located about thirty miles northeast of modern Mexico City. The ethnicity of this settlement's inhabitants is debated. Some scholars



**Olmec:** Mesoamerican civilization that thrived over 2000 years ago and left behind giant stone heads.



**Quetzalcoatl:** Feathered serpent god of the pre-Columbian Mesoamericans.



**Mesoamerica:** Region that includes the modern-day nations of Mexico and the smaller nations of Central America. It was home to the Olmec, Maya and Aztec cultures.



**Teotihuacan:** Center of a Mesoamerican civilization that thrived north of present Mexico City. It featured giant pyramids and was a precursor to the Maya and Aztec.



believe it was a multiethnic city. Large-scale agriculture and the resultant abundance of food allowed time for people to develop special trades and skills other than farming. Builders constructed over 2,200 apartment compounds for multiple families, as well as more than a hundred temples. Among these were the Pyramid of the Sun (which is two hundred feet high) and the Pyramid of the Moon (one hundred and fifty feet high). Near the Temple of the Feathered Serpent, graves have been uncovered suggesting humans were sacrificed for religious purposes. The city was also the center for trade, which extended to settlements along Mesoamerica's Gulf Coast.

The **Maya** were one Mesoamerican culture with strong ties to Teotihuacan. The Maya's architectural and mathematical contributions were significant. Flourishing from roughly 2000 BCE to 900 CE in what is now Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and Guatemala, the Maya perfected the calendar and written language the Olmec had begun. They devised a written mathematical system to record crop yields and the size of the population, and to assist in trade. Surrounded by farms relying on primitive agriculture, they built the city-states of Copan, Tikal, and Chichen Itza along their major trade routes. Additionally, they built temples, statues of gods, pyramids, and astronomical observatories. However, because of poor soil and a drought that lasted nearly two centuries, their civilization declined by about 900 CE and they abandoned their large population centers.



**Maya:** Great pre-Columbian civilization centered in southern Mexico and Central America. They built cities such as Chichen Itza but their culture collapsed before the arrival of the Spanish.

#### Primary Source: Ruins

The serpent effect can be seen created by the light from the sun during the 2009 spring equinox on the great pyramid at the Mayan city of Chichen Itza.

The Spanish found little organized resistance among the weakened Maya upon their arrival in the 1520s. However, they did find Mayan history, in the form of glyphs, or pictures representing words, recorded in folding books called codices (the singular is **codex**). In 1562, Bishop Diego de Landa, who



**Codex:** Folded books written by the Maya and Aztec.

feared the converted natives had reverted to their traditional religious practices, collected and burned every codex he could find. Today only a few survive.

The **Maya calendar** consisted of two intersecting spoked wheels, the Haab or astronomical year, and the Tzolkin, a 260-day cycle that helped priests know the appropriate times for farming and religious ceremonies.

Even their leisure activities had religious and chronological implications. In U-shaped arenas with sloping wall, the Maya played their famous ball game. These, too, were religious rites. The ball, which was one foot across and made of solid rubber, apparently could not be touched with the hands, much like soccer. Murals show players bouncing the ball with their bodies and feet across the court. This was no mere sport, but ritualized battle. Losers stood to forfeit more than the lucrative contracts of today's athletes. Often they were destined for the sacrificial altar.



**Maya Calendar:** System of keeping time that featured both a short and long count and a nearly perfect measurement of the length of the year.



**Primary Source: Artifact**

The Aztec calendar stone was derived from the Maya system and shows the concentric rings of the long and short counts.

Time obsessed the Maya. They recorded the cycles of Venus, which completes its cycle across the sky every 584 days. They measured the length of the solar year to 365.242000 days, very close to the true value of 365.242198 days. This they called the Vague Year.

Alongside ran their Sacred Round of 260 days — 13 months of 20 days each. Their solar year consisted of 18 of these months, totaling 360 days. The five days remaining were considered times of extreme bad luck.

Most modern math uses the base 10 decimal system, one digit for each finger and thumb. The Maya used a base 20, employing both fingers and

toes. Unial, the word for their 20-day month, is derived from unic, which meant “human being.” To measure longer time periods, Maya mathematicians invented the Long Count, which they expressed as a series of five numbers. For example, 13.0.0.0.0 represented August 13, 3114 BC. This was the day they believed the world began.

Such matters preoccupied the kings, scribes, and noble elite. But what of the ordinary people? What manner of lives did they lead? They lived in oval-shaped houses thatched with palm leaves — an efficient design that served to keep out both torrential rain and the summer heat. They farmed the land, raising crops of corn, beans, tomatoes and squash. Dog, deer, rabbit, and hot peppers rounded out their diet.

### THE AZTEC WORLD

The **Aztecs** dominated the Valley of Mexico for 100 years, until their downfall at the hands of Hernan Cortez and his conquistadors in 1521. They built their capital in the most unlikely of places: the center of a lake. **Tenochtitlan** was a city surrounded by water, with temples and pyramids, sparkling white monuments and ceremonial squares gleaming in the tropical sun. It sat in Lake Texcoco, criss-crossed by canals and connected by three broad causeways to the shore. Along the lake edge the Aztec created chinampas, or raised fields of rotting vegetation and lake-mud. Extraordinarily fertile, they yielded many crops per year.



**Aztec:** Major Mesoamerican culture that was centered around the city of Tenochtitlan (present Mexico City) when the Spanish arrived in the early 1500s.



**Tenochtitlan:** Capital of the Aztec culture and site of present-day Mexico City.



#### Secondary Source: Illustration

An artist's rendition of Tenochtitlan

One story central to the Aztec belief system was the tale of their origins. Aztecs believed that one day while doing housework, the ancient Earth

goddess Coatlicue (Serpent Skirt) was impregnated by a ball of feathers. Coyolxauhqui and the 400 stars of the southern sky, her children of the night, grew jealous and determined to kill her. They sliced off her head.

Her unborn child, Huitzilopochtli, learned of the plot. He leapt from her body fully grown. In his hand he brandished a club lined with slivers of razor-sharp black volcanic glass called obsidian. He chopped up Coyolxauhqui and her brothers — a metaphor for the way the sun overwhelms the moon and stars when it rises at dawn each morning.

Huitzilopochtli commanded the Aztecs to travel south until they found a cactus with an eagle nesting in its branches. After many adventures and much misery, they discovered an island with a prickly pear cactus in the year 1 Flint (1324 AD). Sitting upon it was an eagle with outstretched wings and a snake held tightly in its talons. This became the site of Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City. The Aztecs believed the oval red fruit of the cactus symbolized the human heart. Today an eagle, cactus, and snake are the national emblems of the Republic of Mexico and found on the Mexican flag.

Within 50 years of founding Tenochtitlan, the Aztec had extended their rule all across the valley. They formed political alliances with other states, skillfully intermarried with their nobles, and fought tenaciously in battle. Their empire was created by a culture of war. Boys were taught from an early age to be warriors. A warrior who captured four or more prisoners could become a Jaguar or Eagle Knight, and wear brightly colored body-suits of feathers. Girls were prepared for the battle of childbirth. Women who died in labor became goddesses, accompanying the sun across the sky each day from noon until sunset.

**Primary Source: Codex**

In image from an Aztec codex depicting human sacrifice.





Like the Olmen and Maya before them, the Aztec worshiped a pantheon of gods. Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec God of the Sun, was their principal god. He had an insatiable appetite for blood. Under his urging, the Aztecs rose from a band of primitive farmers to become the bloodiest civilization of the early Americas. Many Central America cultures indulged in human sacrifice. The Aztec practiced it on an industrial scale, sacrificing tens of thousands of victims each year.

By 1519, the Aztec cycle of conquest and exploitation was at its peak. More and more conquered peoples provided tribute, the basis of the Aztecs' immense wealth. More and more prisoners were captured for human sacrifice. Conquistadors were astonished by Aztec marketplaces. They found dealers in gold, silver and precious stones. They saw embroidered clothing and cotton goods and cacao beans for chocolate drinks. Jaguar pelts and deerskins, as well as the brilliant blue plumes of the cotinga bird lined the marketplace. Food included vegetables and fruits, turkeys, young dogs, wild game and many kinds of honey. There were sellers of tobacco, liquid amber, and herbs. All this and more poured into Tenochtitlan. At the same time, the conquistadors heard tales of the day 20,000 captives, some roped together through their noses, wound through the streets to be sacrificed at the top of the Great Temple steps.

Unlike the Maya, whose culture had collapsed before the arrival of Europeans the Spanish arrived in Tenochtitlan at the height of Aztec power. As we shall see in our next reading, however, the Aztec did not succeed in maintaining their culture intact. Instead, their temples were replaced by Catholic cathedrals build by the Spanish. Their culture did live on, though as the descendants of the Aztec melded their beliefs with those of the invaders and today Mexican culture is a vibrant blend of influences from both European and ancient American cultures.

## THE INCA EMPIRE

When Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro landed in South America in 1532 in what is now the nation of Peru, he found unimaginable riches. The **Inca** Empire was in full bloom. The streets may not have been paved with gold, but their temples were.

The Coricancha, or Temple of Gold, boasted an ornamental garden where the clods of earth, maize plants complete with leaves and corn cobs, were fashioned from silver and gold. Nearby grazed a flock of 20 golden llamas and their lambs, watched over by solid gold shepherds. Inca nobles strolled around on sandals with silver soles protecting their feet from the hard streets of **Cuzco**.

The Inca called their empire Tahuantinsuyu, or Land of the Four Quarters. It stretched 2,500 miles from Quito, Ecuador, to beyond Santiago, Chile. Within its domain were rich coastal settlements, high mountain valleys, rain-



**Inca:** Pre-Columbian empire that stretched along the Andes Mountains in south America.



**Cuzco:** Capital city of the Inca Empire.



drenched tropical forests and the driest of deserts. The Inca controlled perhaps 10 million people, speaking a hundred different tongues. It was the largest empire on earth at the time. Yet when Pizarro executed its last emperor, Atahualpa, the Inca Empire was only 50 years old.

The true history of the Inca is still being written by historians and archeologists as they uncover new evidence. According to one story, four brothers emerged from Lake Titicaca. During a long journey, all but one disappeared. Manco Capac survived to plunge a golden staff into the ground where the Rios Tullamayo and Huantanay meet. He founded the sacred city of Cuzco.

Cuzco is nestled in a mountain valley 10,000 feet above sea level. It formed the center of the Inca world. The first emperor, Pachacuti transformed it from a modest village to a great city laid out in the shape of a puma. He also installed Inti, the Sun God, as the Incas' official patron, building him a wondrous temple.

He did something else which may explain the Inca's sudden rise to power. He expanded the cult of ancestor worship. When a ruler died, his son received all his earthly powers but none of his earthly possessions. All his land, buildings, and servants went to his panaqa, or other male relatives. The relatives used it to preserve his mummy and sustain his political influence. Dead emperors maintained a living presence.

A new ruler had to create his own income. The only way to do that was to grab new lands, subdue more people, and expand the Empire of the Sun.

How was this done? Life in traditional Andean villages was fragile. One married couple would help another planting or harvesting crops. They would receive help in their own fields in return. The Inca tailored this practice of reciprocity to their own needs.

Their cities centered on great plazas where they threw vast parties for neighboring chiefs. Festivities continued for days on end, sometimes lasting a month. Dignitaries were fed, and given gifts of gold, jewels, and textiles. Only then would the Inca make their requests for labor, to increase food production, to build irrigation schemes, to terrace hillsides, or to extend the limits of the empire.

The Inca were great builders. They loved stone almost as much as they revered gold. At magical **Machu Picchu**, a frontier fortress and a sacred site, a mystic column, the hitching post of the Sun, is carved from the living rock. Another slab is shaped to echo the mountain beyond.

Temples and fortifications at Machu Picchu were constructed from vast, pillowy boulders, some weighing 100 tons or more. Constructed without mortar, the joins between them are so tight as to deny a knife-blade entry. A vast labor force was required. There are records of 20 men working on a



**Machu Picchu:** Mountain fortress of the Inca Empire. It remains one of the most visited pre-Columbian sites.

single stone, chipping away, hoisting and lowering, polishing it with sand, hour-by-hour for an entire year.

A network of highways allowed Inca emperors to control their sprawling empire. One ran down the spine of the Andes, another along the coast. Inca builders could cope with anything the treacherous terrain required — steep paths cut along mountain sides, rope suspension bridges thrown across steep ravines, or treacherous causeways traversing floodplains. Every mile and a half they built way stations as resting points. Bands of official runners raced between them covering 150 miles a day. A message could be sent 1200 miles from Cuzco to Quito in under a week.

**Primary Source: Ruins**

The ruins of the famous Inca city of Machu Picchu in present-day Peru is a popular tourist destination today.

Everyone was expected to contribute to the empire. Land was divided in three. One third was worked for the emperor, one third was reserved for the gods, and one third the people kept for themselves. All were required to pay taxes as tribute.

The Inca could not write. Tax collectors and bureaucrats kept track of things with quipu, knotted strings. Varying lengths, colors, knot-types, and positions, enabled them to store enormous quantities of information.

Despite its glory, the Incas was a brittle empire, held together by promises and a tenuous network of roads. When Pizarro executed the last emperor,

the empire collapsed. Catholic priests demanding allegiance to a new Christian god soon replaced the Children of the Sun. As they had for thousands of years, the hardy peoples of the Andes adapted. They took what they must from their new masters, and held onto as many of their old ways as they could.

## NORTH AMERICA

With few exceptions, the North American native cultures were much more widely dispersed than the Mayan, Aztec, and Incan societies, and did not develop vast empires or metropolitan cities. Although the cultivation of corn had made its way north, most North American groups still practiced hunting and gathering. To understand the diversity of the people who populated the land that has become the United States, we will explore just a few of the hundreds of cultural groups.

In the southwestern part of today's United States dwelled several groups we collectively call the **Pueblo**. The Spanish first gave them this name, which means "town" or "village," because they lived in towns or villages of permanent stone-and-mud buildings with thatched roofs. Like present-day apartment houses, these buildings had multiple stories, each with multiple rooms.

Pueblo peoples developed a distinctive artistic style for painting bowls with finely drawn geometric figures and wildlife, especially birds, in black on a white background. They also refined the use of turquoise in jewelry. The Pueblo built an extensive irrigation system of canals to water the desert and grow fields of corn, beans, and squash. In the high desert of New Mexico, they carved homes from steep cliffs accessed by ladders or ropes that could be pulled in at night or in case of enemy attack.



**Pueblo:** Pre-Columbian civilization that thrived in what is now the Southwest United States. They build homes out of stone and mud that were sometimes multiple stories high.



### Primary Source: Ruins

Ancient Puebloan groups built these apartment-like homes into the sides of a cliff in present-day Mesa Verde National Park.



Roads extending some 180 miles connected the Pueblos' smaller urban centers to each other and to Chaco Canyon, which by 1050 CE had become the administrative, religious, and cultural center of their civilization. A century later, however, probably because of drought, the Pueblo peoples abandoned their cities. Their present-day descendants include the Hopi and Zuni tribes.

The Native American groups who lived in the present-day Ohio River Valley and achieved their cultural apex from the first century CE to 400 CE are collectively known as the **Hopewell** culture. Their settlements, unlike those of the southwest, were small hamlets. They lived in houses made of wood, straw and mud and practiced agriculture, which they supplemented by hunting and fishing. Utilizing waterways, they developed trade routes stretching from Canada to Louisiana, where they exchanged goods with other tribes and negotiated in many different languages. From the coast they received shells; from Canada, copper; and from the Rocky Mountains, obsidian. With these materials they created necklaces, woven mats, and exquisite carvings. What remains of their culture today are huge burial mounds and earthworks. Many of the mounds that were opened by archaeologists contained artworks and other goods that indicate their society was socially stratified.



**Hopewell:** Pre-Columbian civilization centered around the Mississippi River. They built major huge earthen mounds and established extensive trading networks with other tribes.



#### Primary Source: Ruins

The long, undulating form of the Serpent Mound, which can truly only be appreciated from high above. Of course, the Hopewell people who carried out the enormous amount of labor to construct it, had no way to fly.

Perhaps the largest indigenous cultural and population center in North America was located along the Mississippi River near present-day St. Louis. At its height in about 1100 CE, this five-square-mile city, now called **Cahokia**, was home to more than 10,000 residents and tens of thousands more lived on farms surrounding the urban center. The city also contained 120 earthen mounds or pyramids, each dominating a particular neighborhood and on each lived a leader who exercised authority over the surrounding area. Cahokia was the hub of political and trading activities along the Mississippi River. After 1300 CE, however, this civilization declined and it was entirely gone by the time Europeans arrived.



**Cahokia:** Largest pre-Columbian settlement in what became the United States. It covered five square miles and featured large mounds along the banks of the Mississippi River near the modern city of St. Louis.



When the English set foot on the North American continent at Jamestown, the people they encountered were Powhatan. When the Pilgrims and Puritans established a new home in New England, they met Pequots and Narragansetts. William Penn encountered the Leni Lenape natives when he arrived in the future Pennsylvania. Although these tribes were all different, they are linked linguistically and their way of life was also similar, defined by the rich natural resources and forests of the Atlantic Coast.

**Algonquian** and Algonkian both refer to the Algonquin language or to the group of tribes that speak related dialects. Therefore, the Algonquian tribes (including the tribes the English first encountered) are so called because they all speak the Algonquin or Algonquin language.



**Algonquian:** Collection of tribes who shared similar culture and language centered in New England.

The Algonkians relied as much on hunting and fishing for food as working the land. These tribes used canoes to travel the inland waterways. The bow and arrow was used to hunt small and large game, and the spear generated ample supplies of fish for the Algonkian peoples. Corn and squash were a few of the crops that were cultivated all along the eastern seaboard.

As the first group to encounter the English, the Algonkians became the first to illustrate the deep cultural misunderstandings between British settlers and Native Americans. British Americans thought Algonquian women were oppressed because of their work in the fields. Algonkian men laughed at the British men who farmed, traditionally work reserved for females. Hunting was a sport in England, so British settlers thought the Algonkian hunters to be unproductive.

As we shall see over and over in our study of American history, the greatest misunderstanding was that of land ownership. In the minds of the Algonkians selling land was like selling air. Eventually this confusion would lead to armed conflict.

#### Secondary Source: Map

A map of the native cultures of North America makes it easy to understand the diversity of Pre-Columbian societies.





---

**CONCLUSION**

Historians sometimes have a hard time finding ways to describe civilizations that have long vanished. We too often err on the side of glorifications, or focus too much on sensational elements of their cultures such as human sacrifices.

Pre-Columbian Native Americans defy easy description, which is unfortunate, because stereotypes have supplanted true understanding. The books, movies and television shows of popular culture have stepped in and created the image, which stands in the minds of contemporary Americans for all of the indigenous peoples of our country. That image is the Noble Savage, a person who is both pure and uncivilized. Unlike the Europeans and Asians they met, they did not have guns or ride horses. They were not Christian.

For the noble savage image to work, one must view Native American culture as inferior to the cultures of Europe and Asia and simultaneously see them as innocent of the evils of the Old World. However, is any of this real? Is there any basis for this in history? Is popular culture's portrayal of Native Americans as noble savages accurate?

**SUMMARY**

The very first humans to live in North and South America arrive during the Ice Ages when sea levels were lower and the land between Asia and Alaska was exposed. They were nomads following game animals. Over the centuries, descendants of these first inhabitants spread throughout the rest of the Americas.

Their societies evolved into a myriad of distinct cultures with unique languages, religions and folkways, often influenced by the particular geography and climate where they lived.

In Central and South America, as well as in Mexico, large, powerful, complex societies developed that featured massive cities and written language. The Maya in southern Mexico and Central America built pyramids and a complex calendar system. However, their culture had disappeared before the arrival of the Europeans.

In South America, the Inca developed a complex system of roads to connect distant regions of their empire. They were excellent builders and cut stones so precisely that their cities, such as Machu Picchu, have lasted for centuries without mortar to hold them together.

In central Mexico the Aztec Empire built the massive city of Tenochtitlan that stood at the site of modern Mexico City. The Aztec religion included the practice of human sacrifice, which horrified Spanish conquistadors who met them.

In North America, societies varied greatly. Two regions show the differences: In the Southwest people grew corn, built homes from adobe or carved homes out of cliffs. In the Northeast, people hunted, fished and farmed, and built permanent homes out of wood. These included the people that English settlers first met when they arrived in New England and Jamestown. Some of their cultures had well developed political systems, such as the Iroquois League.



## PEOPLE AND GROUPS

**Olmec:** Mesoamerican civilization that thrived over 2000 years ago and left behind giant stone heads.

**Quetzalcoatl:** Feathered serpent god of the pre-Columbian Mesoamericans.

**Maya:** Great pre-Columbian civilization centered in southern Mexico and Central America. They built cities such as Chichen Itza but their culture collapsed before the arrival of the Spanish.

**Aztec:** Major Mesoamerican culture that was centered around the city of Tenochtitlan (present Mexico City) when the Spanish arrived in the early 1500s.

**Inca:** Pre-Columbian empire that stretched along the Andes Mountains in south America.

**Pueblo:** Pre-Columbian civilization that thrived in what is now the Southwest United States. They build homes out of stone and mud that were sometimes multiple stories high.

**Hopewell:** Pre-Columbian civilization centered around the Mississippi River. They built major huge earthen mounds and established extensive trading networks with other tribes.

**Algonquian:** Collection of tribes who shared similar culture and language centered in New England.



## TEXTS

**Codex:** Folded books written by the Maya and Aztec.



## SCIENCE

**Maya Calendar:** System of keeping time that featured both a short and long count and a nearly perfect measurement of the length of the year.



## LOCATIONS

**Bering Land Bridge:** The name for the floor of the Bering Sea that was exposed dry land during the period of glaciation. It was crossed by nomads from Asia to North America who became the first Americans.

**Mesoamerica:** Region that includes the modern-day nations of Mexico and the smaller nations of Central America. It was home to the Olmec, Maya and Aztec cultures.

**Teotihuacan:** Center of a Mesoamerican civilization that thrived north of present Mexico City. It featured giant pyramids and was a precursor to the Maya and Aztec.

**Tenochtitlan:** Capital of the Aztec culture and site of present-day Mexico City.

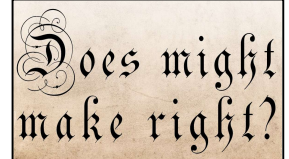
**Cuzco:** Capital city of the Inca Empire.

**Machu Pichu:** Mountain fortress of the Inca Empire. It remains one of the most visited pre-Columbian sites.

**Cahokia:** Largest pre-Columbian settlement in what became the United States. It covered five square miles and featured large mounds along the banks of the Mississippi River near the modern city of St. Louis.

# 2

## S E C O N D Q U E S T I O N DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



### INTRODUCTION

Christopher Columbus is often labeled the discoverer of America and remembered as the man who set off an age of wealth and glory for Spain.

However, Columbus did not discover America. Native Americans had lived there for millennia. Nor was he looking for America. In fact, for years he was convinced he had landed in Asia, which was his intended destination. His sense of the world's size was incorrect, a fact well known in his own time.

Columbus wasn't even Spanish. He was from Genoa, Italy and had tried to sell his idea for an exploratory voyage west across the ocean to Asia to the kings of Italy and Portugal before the Spanish finally agreed to fund his venture.

And yet, he was celebrated in story and song. His image graces postage stamps and statues. Our nation's capital (DC is short for District of Columbia) is named for him, as is a nation in South America.

In modern times Columbus has become a flashpoint for protests. Those who decry the cultural destruction of Native American societies have used Columbus Day as a day of protest, and changed its name in many places to Discoverer's Day or Indigenous People's Day. The victor has become the vanquished as we apply modern moral values to historical events.

Perhaps this is much ado about nothing. Columbus lived and died 500 years ago. What's the point of celebrating or vilifying him now? If it hadn't been Columbus, surely other Europeans would have done what he did eventually, and other European conquerors were far more brutal than Columbus. In reality, disease was the most significant destroyer of Native American societies. And after all, what Columbus did was enormously significant in his own time, and a history-changing event.

What do you think, does Columbus deserve his honored place in history?

## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



### EUROPE, TRADE, AND THE MIDDLE AGES

The story of Europeans arriving and settling in the Americas begins long before Columbus set sail in 1492. The reasons why the king and queen of Spain decided to spend precious resources to fund his voyage at all have their roots much further back in history. To understand Europe's Age of Exploration, we need to explore a little more deeply into what was happening there in the 1400s, and why that century was so different from the thousand years that had preceded it.

The fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE marked the end of an era in Europe. For hundreds of years, the Romans had maintained peace in the Mediterranean region through force and had provided a unifying, centralized government. They had also provided the conditions necessary for economic prosperity. After the fall of their empire, Europe had no dominant centralized power or overarching cultural hub and experienced political, social, and military discord. These were what historians called the **Middle Ages**, or sometimes more poetically the Dark Ages. Centers of learning, art, and innovation moved elsewhere in the world, most notably to the Middle East where Islam emerged, and Muslim leaders build a series of expansive and thriving empires.

After the bubonic plague swept through Europe in the 1300s, Europe experienced a period of bountiful harvests and an expansion in population. By 1450, a newly rejuvenated European society was on the brink of tremendous change. Martin Luther would soon write his 95 Theses and launch the Protestant Reformation. Artists and inventors such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were beginning a period of innovation we remember as the Renaissance.

However, most importantly for our story, Europeans were rediscovering a taste for spices from far away places in Asia. Such flavors were not entirely new in Europe. In fact, Roman leaders had openly worried that their empire would go bankrupt as Roman elites spent their wealth on exotic flavors from the East. However, trade had diminished during the Middle Ages until Christian leaders and monarchs organized the **Crusades**. These were a series of military escapades in which they led armies to the Middle East in an effort to wrest control of Jerusalem from Muslims. Those who made it back home, told of the delicious spices that could be found in the markets of the Middle East, and savvy European traders realized there was a fortune to be made if they could find some way to bring those flavors to market in European towns and cities.

A lively trade developed along a variety of routes known collectively as the **Silk Road**, to supply the demand for these products. Brigands and greedy middlemen made the trip along this route expensive and dangerous. The fall of the city of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1453 was a pivotal motivation for European exploration, as trade throughout the Ottoman



**Middle Ages:** A time period in European history between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance. It was characterized by a lack of centralized political authority and little emphasis on education.

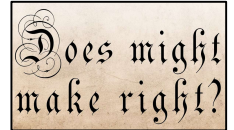


**Crusades:** A series of military invasions of the Middle East during the Middle Ages led by Catholic kings from Europe who attempted to recapture the city of Jerusalem from Muslims.



**Silk Road:** Nickname for a collection of trade routes across Asia connecting China, India, and the East Indie with the Middle East and Europe.

## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



Empire was difficult and unreliable. By the late-1400s, Europeans were anxious to find new trade routes with the rest of the world. The lure of profit pushed explorers to seek new trade routes to the Spice Islands and eliminate Muslim middlemen.



Secondary Source: Woodblock

Early 17<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese woodblock print, thought to represent Zheng He's ships

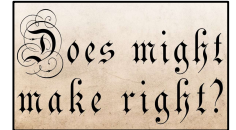
### EARLY TRAVELLERS

In the 1400s, few people anywhere in the world travelled more than a few hundred miles from their home at any point in their lifetime. But this did not mean that no one ever travelled great distances, or that people knew nothing of the wider world. Indian Ocean trade routes were sailed by Arab traders. Between 1405 and 1421, the Emperor of Ming China sponsored a series of long-range sailings missions led by **Zheng He**. His fleets visited Arabia, East Africa, India, Maritime Southeast Asia, and Thailand. There are some historians who speculate that Zheng He may have travelled much further, perhaps even around the world. But the Ming journeys were halted abruptly after the emperor's death, and were not followed up, as the




**Zheng He:** Chinese admiral who led a flotilla of ships in the early 1400s on an exploratory and trading mission through Southeast Asia and India.

## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?




subsequent rulers of the Chinese Ming Dynasty chose isolationism instead of economic engagement and limited maritime trade.

Some European Christian embassies travelled east during the Middle Ages. Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, journeyed to Mongolia and back in the 1240s. About the same time, Russian Prince Yaroslav of Vladimir, and subsequently his sons, Alexander Nevsky and Andrey II of Vladimir, traveled to the Mongolian capital. Though having strong political implications, their journeys left no detailed accounts. Other travelers followed, like French André de Longjumeau and Flemish William of Rubruck, who reached China through Central Asia. From 1325 to 1354, a Moroccan scholar from Tangier, **Ibn Battuta**, journeyed through North Africa, the Sahara desert, West Africa, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, having reached China. In total, Ibn Battuta was probably the most widely travelled person in the world in his time.

 **Ibn Battuta:** Muslim explorer who was the mostly widely travelled person in the world in his time. He visited Europe, Africa, and China

Despite the fact that others came before and probably covered more miles, **Marco Polo**, a Venetian merchant is the most influential of all of the people who spent years travelling in the Middle Ages, because it was Marco Polo who wrote a book that was widely available in Europe. His travels are recorded in Book of the Marvels of the World, (also known as The Travels of Marco Polo). Filled with some truths and a great deal of fiction, Marco Polo's book told of meeting the Mongolian emperor and of the products available in Asia. He inspired Christopher Columbus and many other travelers.

 **Marco Polo:** Italian explorer who travelled to China and published a popular book about his adventures. He inspired Columbus and other later European explorers.

### Primary Source: Book

A page from Marco Polo's Book of the Marvels of the World



## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



### NORSE IN AMERICA

The Vikings, a group of **Norse** from Southern Scandinavia, are thought to be the first European explorers to arrive in North America. They sailed to what is now Newfoundland, on the far eastern end of modern Canada over 500 years before Columbus. Historical and archaeological evidence tells us that Norse people established colonies in Iceland, Greenland, and at **L'Anse aux Meadows** in Newfoundland.

**Leif Erikson** was an Icelandic explorer considered by some as the first European other than the Vikings on Greenland, to land in North America. According to the Sagas of Icelanders, Leif was the son of Erik the Red, who was the founder of the first Norse settlement in Greenland. Leif established a Norse settlement at Vinland, tentatively identified with the Norse L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland in modern-day Canada. Later archaeological evidence suggests that Vinland may have been the area around the Gulf of St. Lawrence and that the L'Anse aux Meadows site was a ship repair station.

Unlike the more well-established settlements in Iceland and Greenland, however, continental North American settlements were small and did not develop into permanent colonies. While voyages, to collect timber for example, might have stretched as far south as modern-day New York and are likely to have occurred for some time, there is no evidence of enduring Norse settlements on mainland North America.

The Norse colony in Greenland began to decline in the 1300s, and it is probable that the settlements were defunct by the time Columbus set sail in 1492. Several theories have been advanced to explain the decline, such as the Little Ice Age, disunity within the Viking civilization due to the emergence of a unified Christian kingdom in Norway, and a series of devastating bouts of epidemic disease in Europe.

### THE EUROPEAN AGE OF DISCOVERY

By the middle of the 1400s, Europeans, led by sailors from Italy, Portugal and Spain were looking for new routes to Asia. Their quest was aided by a collection of new innovations. Prior to the 1400s, Europeans largely relied on a ship known as the galley. Although galleys were fast and maneuverable, they were designed for use in the confined waters of the Mediterranean, and were unstable and inefficient in the open ocean. To cope with oceanic voyages, European sailors adapted a ship largely used in the Baltic and North Sea, which they improved by adding sail designs used in the Islamic world. These new ships, known as **caravels**, had deep keels, which gave them stability, combined with lateen sails, which allowed them to best exploit oceanic winds.



**Norse:** A group of people who lived in Scandinavia. They were known as fearsome invaders and excellent sailors. They are also called Vikings and were the first Europeans to land in North America but did not establish lasting settlements.



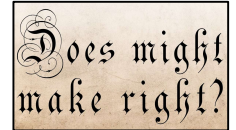
**L'Anse aux Meadows:** Norse settlement in North America in what is now the Canadian Province of Newfoundland.



**Leif Erikson:** Norse explorer who was the first European to land in North America.

**Caravel:** A ship developed in Europe that had was designed specifically for sailing in the open Atlantic Ocean.

## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



### Primary Source: Illustration

The Portuguese capital city of Lisbon depicted in 1572. The harbor is filled with caravels and larger galleons, a ship design developed for trans-oceanic trade after the discovery of the Americas.

The **astrolabe** was a new navigational instrument in Europe, one borrowed from the Islamic world, where it was used in the deserts by camel caravans. Using coordinates via the sky, one rotation of the astrolabe's plate, called a tympan, represented the passage of one day, allowing sailors to approximate the time, direction in which they were sailing, and the number of days passed. The astrolabe was eventually replaced by the **sextant** as the chief navigational instrument in the 1700s. The sextant measured celestial objects in relation to the horizon, as opposed to measuring them in relation to the instrument. As a result, explorers were able to sight the sun at noon and determine their latitude, which made this instrument more accurate than the astrolabe.



**Astrolabe:** Navigation instrument developed in the Muslim world and borrowed by European sailors. It used the location of the sun to determine location.



**Sextant:** Instrument that replaced the astrolabe and was used by sailors in the 1700s to determine location while at sea.

While seafaring Italian traders commanded the Mediterranean and controlled trade with Asia, Spain and Portugal, at the edges of Europe, relied upon middlemen and paid higher prices for Asian goods. They sought a more direct route. And so they looked to the Atlantic. Portugal invested heavily in exploration. From his estate on the Sagres Peninsula of Portugal, a rich sailing port, **Prince Henry the Navigator** invested in research and technology and underwrote many technological breakthroughs. Although he never travelled himself, his nickname in history honors the fact that many of his investments bore fruit. Portuguese sailors established forts along the Atlantic coast of Africa, inaugurating centuries of European colonization there. Portuguese trading posts generated new profits that funded more trade and exploration. Trading posts spread across the vast coastline of Africa where the Portuguese learned they could use African slaves, to grow sugarcane, a product that was rare in Europe. In doing so, the Portuguese encouraged Africans to go to war against other Africans in order to capture slaves to trade for European guns and iron. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Portugal's **Vasco de Gama** leapfrogged his way around the coasts of Africa to reach India and lucrative Asian markets.



**Prince Henry the Navigator:** Portuguese king who promoted exploration by sea.



**Vasco de Gama:** Portuguese explorer who was the first European to sail around the southern tip of African and reach India.

The vagaries of ocean currents and the limits of contemporary technology forced Portuguese and Spanish sailors to sail west into the open sea before cutting back east to Africa. As they did, they stumbled upon several islands

## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



off the coast of Europe and Africa, including the Azores, the Canary Islands, and the Cape Verde Islands. They became training ground for the later colonization of the Americas.

It was while the Portuguese were colonizing coastal settlements along Africa's Atlantic coast that feudalism was starting to fade in Europe. Nation-states began to emerge under the consolidated authority of powerful kings. A series of military conflicts between England and France—the Hundred Years War—accelerated nationalism and cultivated the financial and military administration necessary to maintain nation-states. In Spain, the marriage of **Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile** consolidated the two most powerful kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula. Together they led la Reconquista, a war to expel Muslim Moors from what has become the nation of Spain.



**Ferdinand and Isabella:** King and Queen of Spain. Their marriage united the two largest kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, thus created the modern nation of Spain. They also drove out the last Muslims from the Peninsula and funded Columbus.

### Secondary Source: Painting

"The Landing of Columbus" by John Vanderlyn hangs in the Rotunda of the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC. Painted in 1846, Vanderlyn's fictionalized portrayal of Columbus's landing looks little, if anything, like the actual event.



### THE VOYAGES OF COLUMBUS

Educated Asians and Europeans of the 1400s knew the world was round. They also knew that while it was technically possible to reach Asia by sailing west from Europe, the Earth's vast size would doom even the greatest caravels to starvation and thirst long before they ever reached their destination. One Venetian sailor did not believe this. **Christopher Columbus** underestimated the size of the globe by a full two-thirds and therefore believed it was possible to arrive in the East by sailing west. After unsuccessfully shopping his proposed expedition in several European courts, he convinced Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand to provide him three small ships, which set sail in 1492. Columbus was both confoundingly wrong about the size of the Earth and spectacularly lucky that North and South America lay in his path. On October 12, 1492, after two months at sea, the Niña, Pinta,



**Christopher Columbus:** Italian explorer who sailed for Spain. He crossed the Atlantic in 1492 and "discovered" America.

## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



and Santa Maria and their 90 men landed in the modern-day Bahamas. Columbus, in what is probably one of the greatest examples of self-confirmation bias in history, believed he had landed in Asia and called the land India. Even today, the islands of the Caribbean are known as the West Indies.

The indigenous Arawaks populated the Caribbean islands. They fished and grew corn, yams, and cassava. Columbus described them as innocent. “They are very gentle and without knowledge of what is evil; nor do they murder or steal,” he reported to the Spanish crown. “Your highness may believe that in all the world there can be no better people... They love their neighbors as themselves, and they have the sweetest talk in the world, and are gentle and always laughing.” But Columbus had come for the products Marco Polo had described in his book and little were to be found in the Bahamas. The Arawaks, however, wore small gold ornaments. Columbus left thirty-nine Spaniards at a military fort to find and secure the source of the gold while he returned to Spain to great acclaim and to outfit a return voyage.

Spain’s New World motives were clear from the beginning. If outfitted for a return voyage, Columbus promised the Spanish crown “as much gold as they need” and “as many slaves as they ask.” “They would make fine servants,” Columbus reported, referring to the indigenous Caribbean people. “With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.” It was God’s will, he said.

Columbus was outfitted with 17 ships and over 1,000 men to return to the West Indies. In all, Columbus made four voyages to the New World. Until his death, Columbus continued to believe he had landed in the East Indies. Although he proved to be a poor governor of Spain’s expanding colonies in America, which spread from the Bahamas to Hispaniola, Cuba, and eventually to Mexico and beyond, Columbus is remembered as the man who connected the Old and New Worlds. Although the Norse crossed the Atlantic before him, and many other more talented leaders followed and developed Spain’s New World empire, it is Columbus who is celebrated and vilified for his first fateful voyage of 1492.

### THE TREATY OF TORDESILLAS

With Columbus’s journeys and the subsequent development Spanish colonies in America, conflict emerged between the Spanish and Portuguese. Both nations were led by Catholic monarchs, and there was a danger that they would go to war over control of global trade and lucrative colonies. They turned to the Pope in Rome to fashion an agreement to divide the world between them. In 1494, they signed the **Treaty of Tordesillas**. In the treaty, the Portuguese received everything outside Europe east of a line that ran 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands (already Portuguese), and the islands reached by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage (claimed for Spain—Cuba, and Hispaniola). This gave them control over Africa, Asia, and



**Treaty of Tordesillas:** Treaty between Spain and Portugal dividing the world. It was drafted by the Pope in an effort to avoid war between the two most powerful Catholic nations. Portugal was given Africa and Brazil. Spain received the rest of the Americas and the Philippines.

## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



eastern South America where they developed the colony of Brazil where Portuguese remains the predominant language.

The Spanish received everything west of this line. At the time, European maps west of the treaty line were blank as they still knew almost nothing of the Americas. However, because of the Treaty of Tordesillas, Spain gained unrestricted access to most of the Americas, plus the Philippines in the Pacific, which would also eventually fall under the reign of the Spanish Empire. Of course, when the Pope divided the world, he ignored the millions of Native Americans, Africans, Filipinos, and others who would eventually fall under the rule of these two great empires.

### CONCLUSION

Columbus was not the first European to arrive in America, and he did not personally oversee the destruction of Native societies. In the grand scheme of things, Columbus was actually a minor player. The powerful kings and queens of Portugal and Spain, and the economic forces of world trade probably did far more to change history than Columbus.

Yet, we gravitate toward heroes, and being the first (or at least claiming to be the first) to do something is often reason enough to raise someone up as our champion.

Quite literally, Columbus has been raised up on numerous pedestals. He is the namesake of dozens of cities, a nation, a river, a time period in history, fountains and world fairs. His likeness graces paintings in our nation's capitol building, postage stamps, and children's history books.

But are the works of the real man worth the praise, or have we conflated Columbus with ideas much larger than the person himself?

What do you think? Does Columbus deserve his honored place in history?

## 2 DOES COLUMBUS DESERVE HIS HONORED PLACE IN HISTORY?



### SUMMARY

Exploration of the Americas by Europeans in the 1400s and 1500s was a result of historical trends that had begun long before. Spices and products from the Far East had been novelties in Europe and highly sought after, however, due to the disruptions of trade caused by wars in the Middle East, Europeans began searching for alternative routes to find these products.

The Portuguese began exploring the coast of Africa in an attempted to find a way to sail around that continent. This is why there are numerous nations in Africa that speak Portuguese and Portuguese-speaking ports in India and China. Portuguese sailors were swept across the Atlantic in storms and landed in Brazil, which later became a Portuguese colony as well, and the only Portuguese-speaking country in the Americas.

Spain as a nation did not exist as we know it today until the 1480s when two kingdoms were united by the marriage of their king and queen. Ferdinand and Isabella not only merged their two kingdoms, but also evicted the last of the Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula and funded an expedition by Italian sailor Columbus to find a way across the Atlantic Ocean to China.

Columbus and most Europeans understood that the world was round, he was just wrong about how big it was. When he landed on an island in what is now the Bahamas, he was convinced that he had arrived in China. Altogether, Columbus made four trips to America on behalf of Spain. Although he is remembered as the “discoverer” of America, Native Americans had been living there for thousands of years. He was also not a particularly good governor and lost his job as leader of the Spanish colonies in the New World.

Spain and Portugal were both Catholic nations, and to prevent conflicts they asked the Pope to divide the world between them. The resulting Treaty of Tordesillas split the world when the Pope drew a line north to south. The Americas, except Brazil, fell to the west of the line and were given to Spain. Africa was on the east of the line. This is why most of Central and South America speak Spanish, whereas few places in Africa speak Spanish.



## LOCATIONS

**Silk Road:** Nickname for a collection of trade routes across Asia connecting China, India, and the East Indie with the Middle East and Europe.

**L'Anse aux Meadows:** Norse settlement in North America in what is now the Canadian Province of Newfoundland.



## PEOPLE AND GROUPS

**Zheng He:** Chinese admiral who led a flotilla of ships in the early 1400s on an exploratory and trading mission through Southeast Asia and India.

**Ibn Battuta:** Muslim explorer who was the mostly widely travelled person in the world in his time. He visited Europe, Africa, and China

**Marco Polo:** Italian explorer who travelled to China and published a popular book about his adventures. He inspired Columbus and other later European explorers.

**Norse:** A group of people who lived in Scandinavia. They were known as fearsome invaders and excellent sailors. They are also called Vikings and were the first Europeans to land in North America but did not establish lasting settlements.

**Leif Erikson:** Norse explorer who was the first European to land in North America.

**Prince Henry the Navigator:** Portuguese king who promoted exploration by sea.

**Vasco de Gama:** Portuguese explorer who was the first European to sail around the southern tip of African and reach India.

**Ferdinand and Isabella:** King and Queen of Spain. Their marriage united the two largest kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, thus created the modern nation of Spain. They also drove out the last Muslims from the Peninsula and funded Columbus.

**Christopher Columbus:** Italian explorer who sailed for Spain. He crossed the Atlantic in 1492 and "discovered" America.



## EVENTS

**Middle Ages:** A time period in European history between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance. It was characterized by a lack of centralized political authority and little emphasis on education.

**Crusades:** A series of military invasions of the Middle East during the Middle Ages led by Catholic kings from Europe who attempted to recapture the city of Jerusalem from Muslims.



## TECHNOLOGY

**Caravel:** A ship developed in Europe that had was designed specifically for sailing in the open Atlantic Ocean.

**Astrolabe:** Navigation instrument developed in the Muslim world and borrowed by European sailors. It used the location of the sun to determine location.

**Sextant:** Instrument that replaced the astrolabe and was used by sailors in the 1700s to determine location while at sea.



## TREATIES

**Treaty of Tordesillas:** Treaty between Spain and Portugal dividing the world. It was drafted by the Pope in an effort to avoid war between the two most powerful Catholic nations. Portugal was given Africa and Brazil. Spain received the rest of the Americas and the Philippines.

## 3

**WHY DIDN'T MILLIONS OF NATIVE AMERICANS STOP A FEW THOUSAND EUROPEAN CONQUERORS?****INTRODUCTION**

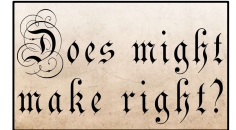
In his 1997 book, “Guns, Germs and Steel”, historian Jared Diamond summarized his theory as to why Europeans were able to conquer so much of the world in the centuries between 1492 and 1900. His thesis became the three words of the title of his book, and his reasoning is sound.

Europeans had metalworking technology. It is true gunpowder was an invention of China, but Europeans arrived on the battlefields of the Age of Discovery with weapons far superior to anything the defenders could muster.

Importantly also, Europeans and Africans carried diseases to the New World that devastated Native American populations. As part of the exchange of ideas, foods, animals and microbes between the Old World and New, diseases that Native Americans had no immunity for swept across the hemisphere and wiped out 90% of the population.

But despite these advantages, both understood and mysterious at the time, it defies logic that a few thousand Europeans could overthrow the powerful empires of Central and South America, and subdue millions of people in just a few decades. How was this possible? Couldn't the Native Americans see the danger the Europeans posed?

Why didn't millions of Native Americans stop a few thousand European conquerors?



## LOS CONQUISTADORS

Columbus's discovery opened a floodgate of Spanish exploration. Inspired by tales of rivers of gold and timid, malleable natives, later Spanish explorers were relentless in their quest for land and gold. Known as **conquistadors** – conquerors – they came by the thousand and established a thriving, albeit violent and culturally destructive empire in America.



**Conquistadors:** Spanish and Portuguese conquerors who led wars on Native Americans and created the colonies in the New World.

## THE FALL OF THE AZTEC

**Hernan Cortés** hoped to gain hereditary privilege for his family, tribute payments and labor from natives, and an annual pension for his service to the crown. Cortés arrived on Hispaniola in 1504 and took part in the conquest of that island.



**Hernan Cortés:** Spanish conquistador who defeated the Aztec.



**Montezuma:** Last Aztec emperor who was defeated by Cortés.

Long before Cortés landed in Mexico at Vera Cruz on Good Friday, 1519, portents of doom appeared. A comet "bright as to turn night into day" lit the sky. Dismayed soothsayers and astrologers maintained they did not see it. For this unhelpful approach, **Montezuma**, the king of the Aztec Empire, cast them into cages where they starved to death. Then, an important temple burned. Lastly, hunters brought Montezuma a bird with a mirror strapped to its head. In it he saw large numbers of people "advance as for war; they appeared to be half men half deer."



Secondary Source: Mural

The Conquest of Mexico as depicted by muralist Diego Rivera

How much of this is fact? How much is myth? By the time spies brought tales of mountains floating upon the sea (Spanish galleons), and men with "flesh very white...a long beard and hair to their ears," Montezuma's nerves were



shattered. Was this the legendary feathered serpent god, **Quetzalcotl**, who having vanished into the eastern ocean, now returned?



**Quetzalcotl:** Mesoamerican feathered serpent god.

Montezuma half-convinced himself Cortés was a god. He sent Cortés the feathery costume of Quetzalcotl with other gifts, including "twenty ducks made of gold, very natural looking." Cortés took the bold move of marching on Tenochtitlan. With a force of 500 Spanish soldiers and whatever warriors he recruited along the way, he faced Montezuma on the city's southern causeway on November 8, 1519. Montezuma invited him in.

Cortés and his men were astonished by the incredibly sophisticated causeways, gardens, and temples in the city, but they were horrified by the practice of human sacrifice that was part of the Aztec religion. Above all else, the Aztec wealth in gold fascinated the Spanish adventurers.

Hoping to gain power over the city, Cortés took Moctezuma, the Aztec ruler, hostage. The Spanish then murdered hundreds of high-ranking Aztecs during a festival to celebrate Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. This angered the people of Tenochtitlan, who rose up against the interlopers in their city. Cortés and his people fled for their lives, running down one of Tenochtitlan's causeways to safety on the shore. Smarting from their defeat at the hands of the Aztec, Cortés slowly created alliances with native peoples who resented Aztec rule. It took nearly a year for the Spanish and the tens of thousands of native allies who joined them to defeat the Mexica in Tenochtitlan, which they did by laying siege to the city. Only by playing upon the disunity among the diverse groups in the Aztec Empire were the Spanish able to capture the grand city of Tenochtitlan. In August 1521, having successfully fomented civil war as well as fended off rival Spanish explorers, Cortés claimed Tenochtitlan for Spain and renamed it Mexico City.

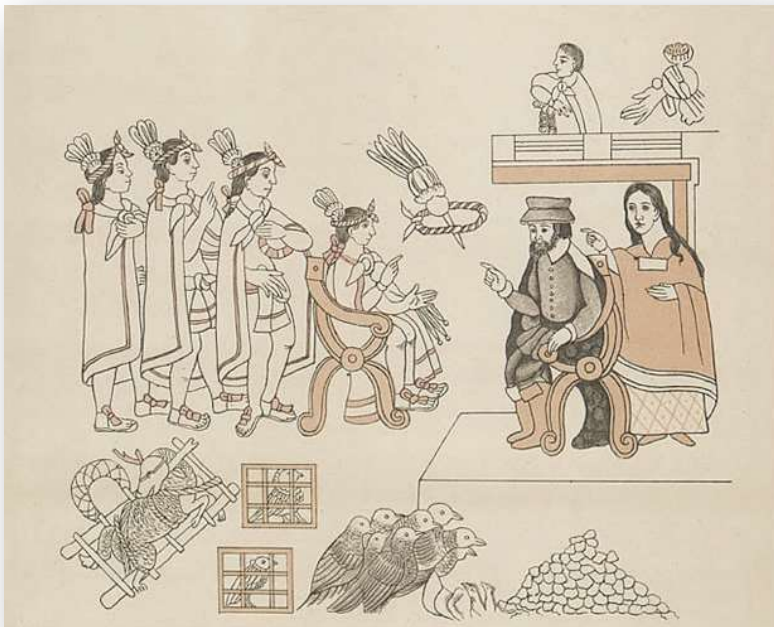
The traditional European narrative of exploration presents the victory of the Spanish over the Aztec as an example of the superiority of the Europeans over the savage Indians. However, the reality is far more complex. When Cortés explored central Mexico, he encountered a region simmering with native conflict. Far from being unified and content under Aztec rule, many peoples in Mexico resented it and were ready to rebel. One group in particular, the Tlaxcalan, threw their lot in with the Spanish, providing as many as 200,000 fighters in the siege of Tenochtitlan. The Spanish also brought smallpox into the valley of Mexico. The disease took a heavy toll on the people in Tenochtitlan, playing a much greater role in the city's demise than did Spanish force of arms.

Cortés was also aided by a Nahua woman called Malintzin (also known as **La Malinche** or Dona Marina, her Spanish name), whom the natives of Tabasco gave him as tribute. Malintzin translated for Cortés in his dealings with Moctezuma and, whether willingly or under pressure, entered into a physical relationship with him. Their son, Martin, may have been the first mestizo (person of mixed indigenous American and European descent). Malintzin



**La Malinche:** Native American woman who helped Cortés defeated the Aztec by providing advice and translation.

remains a controversial figure in the history of the Atlantic World; some people view her as a traitor because she helped Cortés conquer the Aztecs, while others see her as a victim of European expansion. In either case, she demonstrates one way in which native peoples responded to the arrival of the Spanish. Without her, Cortés would not have been able to communicate, and without the language bridge, he surely would have been less successful in destabilizing the Aztec Empire. By this and other means, native people helped shape the conquest of the Americas.



## Primary Source: Codex

An Aztec codex depicting Cortés and Aztec leaders which la Malinche interpreting.

## THE FALL OF THE INCA

The Spanish explorer **Francisco Pizarro**, first arrived in South America in 1526 and recognized the wealth and abundance that could be won by conquering the Inca Empire which was then at its greatest power. He went back to Spain to ask for the official blessing of the Spanish crown to the conquer the area and become governor. Upon his return two years later with the royal blessing, Pizarro and a small force of Spanish conquistadors set out to recreate Cortés's success against the Aztec. Many problems within the Inca Empire worked to their advantage. Foremost among these was that the Inca had turned against themselves in a civil war.

The ruling Inca emperor, Huayna Capac, and his designated heir, Ninan Cuyochic, died of disease. It was most likely smallpox, which had quickly traveled down to South America after the arrival of Spanish explorers in Central America. Brothers Huascar and **Atahualpa**, two sons of the emperor Huayna Capac, both wanted to rule after their father's death. Initially,



**Francisco Pizarro:** Spanish conquistador who defeated the Inca empire.



**Atahualpa:** Inca emperor who was defeated by Pizarro and the Spanish.



Huascar captured the throne in Cusco, claiming legitimacy. However, Atahualpa had a keen military mind and close relations with the military generals at the time, and proved to be the deadlier force. By 1532, Atahualpa had overpowered his brother's forces via intrigue and merciless violence, scaring many local populations away from standing up to his power. This civil war left the population in a precarious position just as Pizarro and his small force were arriving.

The Spanish forces went to meet with Atahualpa and demanded he convert to Catholicism and recognize the authority of Charles I of Spain. Because of the language barrier, the Inca rulers probably did not understand much of these demands, and the meeting turned violent, leaving thousands of native people dead. The Spanish captured Atahualpa and kept him hostage, demanding ransoms of silver and gold. They insisted that Atahualpa agree to be baptized. Although the Inca ruler was mostly cooperative in captivity, and was finally baptized, the Spanish killed him on August 29, 1533, essentially ending the potential for larger Inca attacks on Spanish forces.

Even though the Inca Civil War made it easier for the Spanish armies to gain control initially, many other contributing factors brought about the demise of Inca rule and the crumbling of local populations. As scholar Jared Diamond points out, the Inca Empire was already facing threats. Local unrest in the provinces after years of paying tribute to the Inca elite created immediate allies for the Spanish against the Inca rulers. Second, demanding terrain throughout the empire made it difficult to keep a handle on populations and goods as the empire expanded. Third, diseases that the population had never been exposed to, such as smallpox, diphtheria, typhus, measles, and influenza, devastated large swaths of the population. And finally, superior Spanish military gear, including armor, horses, and weapons, overpowered the siege warfare more common in the Inca Empire.

The Spanish named their vast newly won region the **Viceroyalty of Peru** and set up a Spanish system of rule, which effectively suppressed any type of uprising from local communities. The Spanish system destroyed many of the Inca traditions and ways of life in a matter of years. Their finely honed agricultural system, which utilized tiered fields in the mountains, was completely disbanded. The Spanish also enforced heavy manual labor taxes, called mita, on the local populations. This meant every family had to offer up one person to work in the highly dangerous gold and silver mines. If that family member died, which was common, the family had to replace the fallen laborer. The Spanish also enforced heavy taxes on agriculture, metals, and other fine goods. The population continued to suffer heavy losses due to disease as Spanish rule settled into place.



**Viceroyalty of Peru:** Name for the Spanish colony in South America.

### **THE SPANISH IN NORTH AMERICA**

Spain's drive to enlarge its empire led other hopeful conquistadors to push further into the Americas, hoping to replicate the success of Cortés and



Pizarro. **Hernando de Soto** had participated in Pizarro's conquest of the Inca, and from 1539 to 1542 he led expeditions to what is today the southeastern United States, looking for gold. He and his followers explored what is now Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas. Everywhere they traveled, they brought European diseases, which claimed thousands of native lives as well as the lives of the explorers. In 1542, de Soto himself died during the expedition. The surviving Spaniards, numbering a little over 300, returned to Mexico City without finding the much-anticipated mountains of gold and silver.

**Francisco Vasquez de Coronado** was born into a noble family and went to Mexico, by then called **New Spain**, in 1535. He presided as governor over the province of Nueva Galicia, where he heard rumors of wealth to the north. Between 1540 and 1542, Coronado led a large expedition of Spaniards and native allies to the lands north of Mexico City, and for the next several years, they explored the area that is now the southwestern United States. Rather than leading to the discovery of gold and silver, however, the expedition simply left Coronado bankrupt.

## THOSE WHO LOST THE CONQUEST

Physical power to work the fields, build villages, process raw materials is necessary for maintaining a society. In the 1500s and 1600s, humans could derive power only from the wind, water, animals, or other humans. Everywhere in the Americas, a crushing demand for labor bedeviled Europeans because there were not enough colonists to perform the work necessary to keep the colonies going. Spain granted **encomiendas**, legal rights to native labor, to conquistadors who could prove their service to the crown. This system reflected the Spanish view of colonization: the king rewarded successful conquistadors who expanded the empire. Some native peoples who had sided with the conquistadors, like the Tlaxcalan, also gained encomiendas. Malintzin, the Nahuatl woman who helped Cortés defeat the Aztec, was granted one.

The Spanish believed native peoples would work for them by right of conquest, and, in return, the Spanish would bring them Catholicism. In theory the relationship consisted of reciprocal obligations, but in practice the Spaniards ruthlessly exploited it, seeing native people as little more than beasts of burden. Convinced of their right to the land and its peoples, they sought both to control native labor and to impose what they viewed as correct religious beliefs upon the land's inhabitants. Native peoples everywhere resisted both the labor obligations and the effort to change their ancient belief systems. Indeed, many retained their religion or incorporated only the parts of Catholicism that made sense to them.

The system of encomiendas was accompanied by a great deal of violence. One Spaniard, **Bartolomé de Las Casas**, denounced the brutality of Spanish rule. A Dominican friar, Las Casas had been one of the earliest Spanish



**Hernando de Soto:** Spanish conquistador who explored Florida and the southeastern United States.

He failed to find gold or great civilizations to conquer.



**Francisco Vasquez de Coronado:** Spanish conquistador who explored the southwestern United States.



**New Spain:** The northern Spanish colonies centered in Mexico and Central America.



**Encomiendas:** Spanish system in which conquistadors were rewarded with land and the right to enslave Native Americans.



**Bartolomé de Las Casas:** Spanish priest who wrote about the mistreatment of Native Americans.



settlers in the Spanish West Indies. In his early life in the Americas, he owned Native American slaves and was the recipient of an encomienda. However, after witnessing the savagery with which encomenderos (recipients of encomiendas) treated the native people, he reversed his views. In 1515, Las Casas released his native slaves, gave up his encomienda, and began to advocate for humane treatment of native peoples. He lobbied for new legislation, eventually known as the New Laws, which would eliminate slavery and the encomienda system.

Las Casas's writing about the Spaniards' horrific treatment of Native Americans helped inspire the so-called **Black Legend**, the idea that the Spanish were bloodthirsty conquerors with no regard for human life. Perhaps not surprisingly, those who held this view of the Spanish were Spain's imperial rivals. English writers and others seized on the idea of Spain's ruthlessness to support their own colonization projects. By demonizing the Spanish, they justified their own efforts as more humane. Almost all European colonizers, however, shared a disregard for Native Americans.

Native Americans were not the only source of cheap labor in the Americas. By the middle of the 1500s, Africans formed an important element of the labor landscape, producing the cash crops of sugar and tobacco for European markets. Europeans viewed Africans as non-Christians, which they used as a justification for enslavement. Denied control over their lives, slaves endured horrendous conditions.

At every opportunity, they resisted enslavement, and their resistance was met with violence. Indeed, physical, mental, and sexual violence formed a key strategy among European slaveholders in their effort to assert mastery and impose their will. The Portuguese led the way in the evolving transport of slaves across the Atlantic. Slave "factories" on the west coast of Africa, like **Elmina Castle** in Ghana, served as holding pens for slaves brought from Africa's interior. In time, other European imperial powers would follow in the footsteps of the Portuguese by constructing similar outposts on the coast of West Africa.

The Portuguese traded or sold slaves to Spanish, Dutch, and English colonists in the Americas, particularly in South America and the Caribbean, where sugar was a primary export. Over 10 million African slaves were eventually forcibly moved to the Americas where they found themselves mining and working on plantations.

Las Casas estimated that by 1550, there were 50,000 slaves on the island of Hispaniola. However, it is a mistake to assume that during the very early years of European exploration all Africans came to America as slaves. Some were free men who took part in expeditions, for example, serving as conquistadors alongside Cortés in his assault on Tenochtitlan. Nonetheless,



**Black Legend:** A retelling of the Spanish colonial era that emphasized the mistreatment of Native Americans in order to portray the Spanish as evil.



**Elmina Castle:** Portuguese slave trading fortress on the Atlantic Coast of Africa in what is now Ghana.



African slavery was one of the most tragic outcomes in the emerging Atlantic World.

If the story of the Conquest of the Americas by the Spanish seems to be a long saga of failure and suffering on the part of Native Americans and Africans, that is because it is indeed a long saga of suffering. However, there is one story of resistance to Spanish rule that has come to be celebrated in modern times by those who champion indigenous rights, and that is the story of the Pueblo Revolt.

Intent on expanding their empire, Spanish conquistadors looked north to the land of the Pueblo Indians in what is now the state of New Mexico. Under orders from King Philip II, **Juan de Oñate** violently explored the American southwest for Spain in the late 1590s. The Spanish hoped that what we know as New Mexico would yield gold and silver, but the land produced little of value to them. In 1610, Spanish settlers established themselves at Santa Fe. As they had in other Spanish colonies, Franciscan missionaries labored to bring about a spiritual conquest by converting the Pueblo to Catholicism. At first, the Pueblo adopted the parts of Catholicism that dovetailed with their own long-standing view of the world. However, Spanish priests insisted natives discard their old ways entirely and angered the Pueblo by focusing on the young, drawing them away from their parents. This deep insult, combined with an extended period of drought and increased attacks by local Apache and Navajo in the 1670s which the Pueblo came to believe were linked to the Spanish presence moved the Pueblo to push the Spanish and their religion from the area. Pueblo leader **Popé** demanded a return to native ways so the hardships his people faced would end. To him and to thousands of others, it seemed obvious that “when Jesus came, the Corn Mothers went away.” In 1680, Popé led an uprising against Spanish rule known now as the **Pueblo Revolt** and tried bring about a return to prosperity and a pure, native way of life.

### GALLEONS, TRADE AND PIRATES

As Spain's New World empire grew, Spanish merchants expanded their economic empire. By 1565, Columbus's original dream of connecting Europe and Asia by water was essentially complete. Twice each year, giant **galleons** departed Manila Harbor in the Spanish colony of the **Philippines** on route to Acapulco on the Pacific Coast of Mexico.

The galleon trade was supplied by merchants largely from Fujian Province in southern China who traveled to Manila to sell the Spaniards spices, porcelain, ivory, lacquerware, processed silk cloth and other valuable commodities. Cargoes varied from one voyage to another but often included goods from all over Asia including jade, wax, gunpowder and silk from China; amber, cotton and rugs from India; spices from Indonesia and Malaysia; and a variety of goods from Japan, including fans, chests, screens and porcelain. These goods were mostly bought by silver mined from Mexico and Potosí in



**Juan de Oñate:** Spanish conquistador who violently explored the American Southwest.



**Popé:** Pueblo leader who led the Pueblo Revolt and successfully expelled the Spanish from Pueblo territory in 1680.



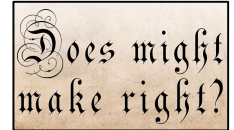
**Pueblo Revolt:** Uprising led by Popé against the Spanish in 1680.



**Galleons:** Giant Spanish and Portuguese ships that carried the wealth of their empires across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.



**Philippines:** Spanish colony in Asia.



Bolivia. In addition, slaves from various origins were transported from Manila. The cargoes arrived in Acapulco and were transported by land across Mexico to the port of Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico, where they were loaded onto the Spanish treasure fleet bound for Spain.

This vast array of wealth, packed tightly into a few ships which travelled on predictable schedules a few times each year to take advantages of the prevailing winds was a ripe target for Dutch and English pirates and the galleons were outfitted with a potent array of weaponry to protect them. The cat and mouse game between the Spanish ships and the pirates inspired stories and legends that fuel the imagination even today. They were the original, and real pirates of the Caribbean. Sometimes these great ships were lost in storms and treasure hunters continue to scour the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea looking for lost Spanish gold.

**Secondary Source: Photograph**

A reconstructed Spanish galleon. These large cargo ships carried the wealth of Asia and the Americas across both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans during the height of Spain's imperial power.

**THE SPANISH GOLDEN AGE**

The exploits of European explorers had a profound impact both in the Americas and back in Europe. An exchange of ideas, fueled and financed in part by New World commodities, began to connect European nations and, in turn, to touch the parts of the world that Europeans conquered.

In Spain, gold and silver from the Americas helped to fuel a golden age, the **Siglo de Oro**, when Spanish art and literature flourished. Riches poured in from the colonies, and new ideas poured in from other countries and new lands. The Hapsburg dynasty, which ruled a collection of territories including Austria, the Netherlands, Naples, Sicily, and Spain, encouraged and financed the work of painters, sculptors, musicians, architects, and writers, resulting in a blooming of Spanish Renaissance culture. One of this period's most famous works is the novel *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La*



**Siglo de Oro:** The golden age of Spain during the 1500s, known as a time when the nation was rich with gold and silver from America, more powerful than its European rivals, and a center for literature and art.



Mancha, by **Miguel de Cervantes**. This two-volume book (1605 and 1618) told a colorful tale of an hidalgo (gentleman) who reads so many tales of chivalry and knighthood that he becomes unable to tell reality from fiction. With his faithful sidekick Sancho Panza, Don Quixote leaves reality behind and sets out to revive chivalry by doing battle with what he perceives as the enemies of Spain.



**Miguel de Cervantes:** Spanish author during the Siglo de Oro. He wrote *Don Quixote* and is sometimes referred to as the Spanish equivalent of Shakespeare.

## Primary Source: Painting

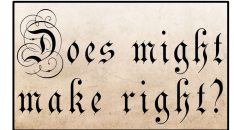
*Las Meninas* (The Maids of Honor), painted by **Diego Velazquez** in 1656, is unique for its time because it places the viewer in the place of King Philip IV and his wife, Queen Mariana.



Spain attracted innovative foreign painters such as El Greco, a Greek who had studied with Italian Renaissance masters like Titian and Michelangelo before moving to Toledo. Native Spaniards created equally enduring works. *Las Meninas* (The Maids of Honor), painted by **Diego Velazquez** in 1656, is one of the best-known paintings in history. Velazquez painted himself into this imposingly large royal portrait (he's shown holding his brush and easel on the left) and boldly placed the viewer where the king and queen would stand in the scene.



**Diego Velazquez:** Spanish painter during the Siglo de Oro. He is sometimes considered the greatest classical painter ever.



## NEW FRANCE

Competing with Spain, Portugal, the United Provinces (the Dutch Republic), and later Britain, France began to establish colonies in North America, the Caribbean, and India in the 1600s. The French first came to the New World as explorers, seeking a route to the Pacific Ocean and wealth. Major French exploration of North America began under the rule of Francis I of France. In 1524, Francis sent Italian-born Giovanni da Verrazzano to explore the region between Florida and Newfoundland for a route to the Pacific Ocean. Verrazzano gave the names Francesca and Nova Gallia to the land between New Spain and English Newfoundland, thus promoting French interests.

In 1534, Francis sent **Jacques Cartier** on the first of three voyages to explore the coast of Newfoundland and the St. Lawrence River. Cartier founded **New France** by planting a cross on the shore of the Gaspé Peninsula. He is believed to have accompanied Verrazzano to Nova Scotia and Brazil, and was the first European to travel inland in North America, describing the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, which he named “The Country of Canadas” after Iroquois names, and claiming what is now Canada for France. He attempted to create the first permanent European settlement in North America at **Quebec** in 1541 with 400 settlers, but the settlement was abandoned the next year. A number of other failed attempts to establish French settlement in North America followed throughout the rest of the 16th century.



**Jacques Cartier:** French explorer who helped found New France.



**New France:** The French colony in North America.



**Quebec:** French colonial settlement in what is now Canada.



### Secondary Source: Map

New France stretched from the mouth of the Mississippi River at the Gulf of Mexico north, through the Great Lakes Region and then on along the St. Lawrence River to the Atlantic Coast of what is now Canada. Despite its impressive size on the map, New France was sparsely populated relative to the Spanish and later English colonies.

Although, through alliances with various Native American tribes, the French were able to exert a loose control over much of the North American continent, areas of French settlement were generally limited to the St. Lawrence River Valley. Based more on cooperation than conquest, the

French colonies profited from a growing **trade in beaver fur**. French **coureur des bois** (runners of the woods) travelled the interior of New France trading European products for beaver pelts. The pelts were shipped back to Europe where they were manufactured into hats.

Because the fur trade relied on good relationships with Native Americans, there was relatively little interest in colonialism in France, which concentrated on dominance within Europe, and for most of its history, New France was far behind the British North American colonies in both population and economic development.



In 1699, French territorial claims in North America expanded still further, with the foundation of **Louisiana** in the basin of the Mississippi River. The extensive trading network throughout the region connected to Canada through the Great Lakes, was maintained through a vast system of



**Beaver Trade:** The foundation of the French colonial economy. Rather than exporting precious minerals or farming, the French relied on trade with Native Americans for this export.



**Coureur des Bois:** Literally "Runners of the Woods." French trappers and traders who travelled the interior of North America trading for beaver fur and living with Native Americans.

## Secondary Source: Painting

AJ Miller's depiction of a meeting between a French fur trader and Native Americans. French traders often married Native American women.



**Louisiana:** French settlement established at the mouth of the Mississippi River.



fortifications, many of them centered in the Illinois Country and in present-day Arkansas.

New France was the area colonized by France in North America during a period beginning with the exploration of the Saint Lawrence River by Jacques Cartier in 1534, and ending with the cession of New France to Spain and Great Britain in 1763. At its peak in 1712, the territory of New France extended from Newfoundland to the Rocky Mountains and from Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico, including all the Great Lakes of North America.

In general, what distinguished New France from the other European settlements in the New World was that the French largely got along with the Native Americans, and built very few cities. As trappers, most French colonists travelled, and the fur trade could only be profitable if Native Americans were willing participants. In the end, because they collaborated rather than replace the Native Americans in their claimed territory, there were actually few French people at all in New France, compared to the density of Spanish and eventually English settlers in their American colonies. This would eventually prove to be a challenge for the French when it came to defending their empire.

### THE WEST INDIES

As the French empire in North America grew, the French also began to build a smaller but more profitable empire in the West Indies. Settlement along the South American coast in what is today French Guiana began in 1624, and a colony was founded on Saint Kitts in 1625. Colonies in Guadeloupe and Martinique were founded in 1635 and on Saint Lucia in 1650. The food-producing plantations of these colonies were built and sustained through slavery, with the supply of slaves dependent on the African slave trade. Local resistance by the indigenous peoples resulted in the Carib Expulsion of 1660.

France's most important Caribbean colonial possession was established in 1664, when the colony of Saint-Domingue, known today as **Haiti** was founded on the western half of the Spanish island of Hispaniola. In the 18th century, Saint-Domingue grew to be the richest sugar colony in the Caribbean. The eastern half of Hispaniola is today's Dominican Republic also came under French rule for a short period, after being given to France by Spain in 1795.

In the middle of the 18th century, a series of colonial conflicts began between France and Britain, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of most of the first French colonial empire and the near complete expulsion of France from the Americas.

### CONCLUSION

The Spanish and French both built empires in the Americas, but their social and economic systems were vastly different.



**Haiti:** French colony on the island of Hispaniola. It was the most wealthy French possession in the New World because of the slave-based sugar industry there.



The Spanish replaced the Native political leaders with their own royal governors and extracted the mineral wealth of the continent for the glorification of Spain. They brutally converted their new subjects to Christianity and used them as slaves.

The French, on the other hand, did little to populate their new territories and collaborated with the Natives they met in order to trade. True, French missionaries also travelled the wilderness looking for converts, but the French colonial experience lacked the violent streak that marked Spanish America.

Regardless of the differences, in the end, Europeans came to rule in the Americas, to the tremendous detriment of the Native population. Which brings us back to our question.

What do you think? Why didn't millions of Native Americans stop a few thousand European conquerors?

**SUMMARY**

Spanish conquistadors were able to conquer the great empires of Mexico and South America relatively easily in the early 1500s.

Hernán Cortés led an expedition of Spanish troops into the heart of Mexico. They were joined by native groups who had been conquered by the Aztec. Cortés was helped by La Malinche, a native woman who helped him by translating and providing insight into native cultural beliefs. Because of her relationship with Cortés, she is viewed as both the first Mexican, and as a traitor. The Aztecs may have believed Cortés was a god and treated him well. However, when it became clear that the Spanish were obsessed with Aztec gold, fighting ensued. Montezuma, the Aztec emperor was killed and the Spanish replaced the Aztec leadership as the rulers of the kingdom.

Francisco Pizarro repeated Cortés's success against the Aztec when he led an expedition into South America. Pizarro captured and executed Atahualpa, the Inca emperor and expanded the Spanish Empire into much of South America.

Spanish attempts to find wealth in North America did not go as well. There were not great societies to conquer. Hernando de Soto explored Florida and much of the American South. Coronado explored the American Southwest.

Wherever the Spanish went, they left behind Old World diseases that devastated the local populations. Where they stayed, they implemented the encomienda system. Spanish conquistadors were given land as a reward for their service. They used the local Native American population as slave labor. Some Spanish, such as the priest Bartolomé de Las Casas protested this brutal system, however it ended mostly because Native Americans died from disease and were replaced by African slaves rather than because the Spanish decided to treat their new subjects better.

Great wealth based on gold and silver from America dramatically changed Spain. A golden age of culture in Spain resulted as the royal family patronized artists. Don Quixote of La Mancha was written. The wealth ultimately destroyed Spain because of runaway inflation.

The French also decided to explore America. Their colonies began in what is now Canada where they created the settlements of Quebec and Montreal. They also built the town of New Orleans at the mouth of the Mississippi River, and claimed the vast inland region between Louisiana, the Great Lakes and Canada. The French engaged in fur trapping and did not build large farms or populate large areas. Instead, they worked with the Native population to trade for furs.

The various islands of the Caribbean were divided between various European nations.



## PEOPLE AND GROUPS

**Conquistadors:** Spanish and Portuguese conquerors who led wars on Native Americans and created the colonies in the New World.

**Hernan Cortés:** Spanish conquistador who defeated the Aztec.

**Montezuma:** Last Aztec emperor who was defeated by Cortés.

**Quetzalcoatl:** Mesoamerican feathered serpent god.

**La Malinche:** Native American woman who helped Cortés defeat the Aztec by providing advice and translation.

**Francisco Pizarro:** Spanish conquistador who defeated the Inca empire.

**Atahualpa:** Inca emperor who was defeated by Pizarro and the Spanish.

**Hernando de Soto:** Spanish conquistador who explored Florida and the southeastern United States. He failed to find gold or great civilizations to conquer.

**Francisco Vasquez de Coronado:** Spanish conquistador who explored the southwestern United States.

**Bartolomé de Las Casas:** Spanish priest who wrote about the mistreatment of Native Americans.

**Juan de Oñate:** Spanish conquistador who violently explored the American Southwest.

**Popé:** Pueblo leader who led the Pueblo Revolt and successfully expelled the Spanish from Pueblo territory in 1680.

**Miguel de Cervantes:** Spanish author during the Siglo de Oro. He wrote Don Quixote and is sometimes referred to as the Spanish equivalent of Shakespeare.

**Diego Velazquez:** Spanish painter during the Siglo de Oro. He is sometimes considered the greatest classical painter ever.

**Jacques Cartier:** French explorer who helped found New France.

**Coureur des Bois:** Literally “Runners of the Woods.” French trappers and traders who travelled the interior of North America trading for beaver fur and living with Native Americans.



## KEY CONCEPTS

**Encomiendas:** Spanish system in which conquistadors were rewarded with land and the right to enslave Native Americans.

**Black Legend:** A retelling of the Spanish colonial era that emphasized the mistreatment of Native Americans in order to portray the Spanish as evil.

**Beaver Trade:** The foundation of the French colonial economy. Rather than exporting precious minerals or farming, the French relied on trade with Native Americans for this export.



## LOCATIONS

**Viceroyalty of Peru:** Name for the Spanish colony in South America.

**New Spain:** The northern Spanish colonies centered in Mexico and Central America.

**Elmina Castle:** Portuguese slave trading fortress on the Atlantic Coast of Africa in what is now Ghana.

**Philippines:** Spanish colony in Asia.

**New France:** The French colony in North America.

**Quebec:** French colonial settlement in what is now Canada.

**Louisiana:** French settlement established at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

**Haiti:** French colony on the island of Hispaniola. It was the most wealthy French possession in the New World because of the slave-based sugar industry there.



## EVENTS

**Pueblo Revolt:** Uprising led by Popé against the Spanish in 1680.

**Siglo de Oro:** The golden age of Spain during the 1500s, known as a time when the nation was rich with gold and silver from America, more powerful than its European rivals, and a center for literature and art.



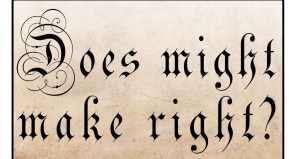
## TECHNOLOGY

**Galleons:** Giant Spanish and Portuguese ships that carried the wealth of their empires across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.



# 4

## F O U R T H Q U E S T I O N WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?



### INTRODUCTION

The Columbian Exchange is the name historians have given to the movement of people, plants, animals, microbes and ideas between the Old World and New after the landfall of Columbus in 1492. Although the Europeans did not intentionally remake the world, their journeys had an enormous impact.

New crops introduced to Europe and Africa from the Americas such as potatoes and corn resulted in a explosion in the population as agriculture could support feed more people. Conversely, Old World diseases such as Smallpox decimated Native American populations. Horses, an Old World animal were brought to America, escaped, were captured by Native Americans and eventually formed the basis for the nomadic societies of the Great Plains.

Gold from the New World enriched colonial nations, but eventually led to inflation and remade the economic systems and brought about an end to feudalism.

Religions spread, as did language, art, music and literature. So did slavery.

The changes brought about by the Columbian Exchange were both positive and negative, but what do you think? Was the Columbian Exchange a net benefit for humanity?

## 4 WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?



### FLORA

As Europeans traversed the Atlantic, they brought with them plants, animals, and diseases that changed lives and landscapes on both sides of the ocean. These two-way exchanges between the Americas and Europe/Africa are known collectively as the **Columbian Exchange**.



**Columbian Exchange:** Name given to the mixing of animals, plants, microbes, people and ideas between the Old World and New World after Columbus's first voyage in 1492.

Of all the commodities in the Atlantic World, sugar proved to be the most important. Indeed, sugar carried the same economic importance as oil does today. European rivals raced to create sugar plantations in the Americas and fought wars for control of some of the best sugar production areas. Although refined sugar was available in the Old World, Europe's harsher climate made sugarcane difficult to grow, and it was not plentiful. Columbus brought sugar to Hispaniola in 1493, and the new crop was growing there by the end of the 1490s. By the first decades of the 1500s, the Spanish were building sugar mills on the island. Over the next century of colonization, the Caribbean islands and most other tropical areas became centers of sugar production.

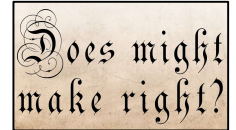
Though of secondary importance to sugar, tobacco achieved great value for Europeans as a cash crop as well. Native peoples had been growing it for medicinal and ritual purposes for centuries before European contact, smoking it in pipes or powdering it to use as snuff. They believed tobacco could improve concentration and enhance wisdom. To some, its use meant achieving an entranced, altered, or divine state; entering a spiritual place.

Tobacco was unknown in Europe before 1492, and it carried a negative stigma at first. The early Spanish explorers considered natives' use of tobacco to be proof of their savagery and, because of the fire and smoke produced in the consumption of tobacco, evidence of the Devil's sway in the New World. Gradually, however, European colonists became accustomed to and even took up the habit of smoking, and they brought it across the Atlantic. As did the Natives, Europeans ascribed medicinal properties to tobacco, claiming that it could cure headaches and skin irritations. Even so, Europeans did not import tobacco in great quantities until the 1590s. At that time, it became the first truly global commodity; English, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese colonists all grew it for the world market.

Native peoples also introduced Europeans to chocolate, made from cacao seeds and used by the Aztec in Mesoamerica as currency. Mesoamerican Indians consumed unsweetened chocolate in a drink with chili peppers, vanilla, and a spice called achiote. This chocolate drink, called xocolatl by the Aztec, was part of ritual ceremonies like marriage and an everyday item for those who could afford it. Chocolate contains theobromine, a stimulant, which may be why native people believed it brought them closer to the sacred world.

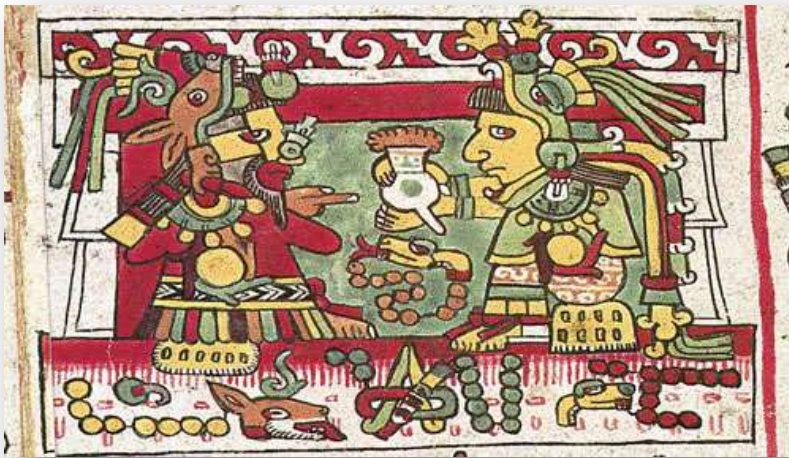
Spaniards in the New World considered drinking chocolate a vile practice. One even called chocolate "the Devil's vomit." In time, however, they

## 4 WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?



introduced the beverage to Spain. At first, chocolate was available only in the Spanish court, where the elite mixed it with sugar and other spices. Later, as its availability spread, chocolate gained a reputation as a love potion.

The crossing of the Atlantic by plants like cacao and tobacco illustrates the ways in which the discovery of the New World changed the habits and behaviors of Europeans. Europeans changed the New World in turn, not least by bringing Old World animals to the Americas. On his second voyage, Christopher Columbus brought pigs, horses, cows, and chickens to the islands of the Caribbean. Later explorers followed suit, introducing new animals or reintroducing ones that had died out (like horses). With less vulnerability to disease, these animals often fared better than humans in their new home, thriving both in the wild and in domestication.



Primary Source: Codex

Maya illustration of people eating and drinking chocolate

### FAUNA

Europeans encountered New World animals as well. Because European Christians understood the world as a place of warfare between God and Satan, many believed the Americas, which lacked Christianity, were home to the Devil and his minions. The exotic, sometimes bizarre, appearances and habits of animals in the Americas that were previously unknown to Europeans, such as manatees, sloths, and poisonous snakes, confirmed this association. Over time, however, they began to rely more on observation of the natural world than solely on scripture. This shift from seeing the Bible as the source of all received wisdom to trusting observation or empiricism is one of the major outcomes of the era of early globalization.

Initially, at least, the Columbian exchange of animals largely went through one route, from Europe to the New World, as the Eurasian regions had domesticated many more animals. Horses, donkeys, mules, pigs, cattle, sheep, goats, chickens, large dogs, cats and bees were rapidly adopted by

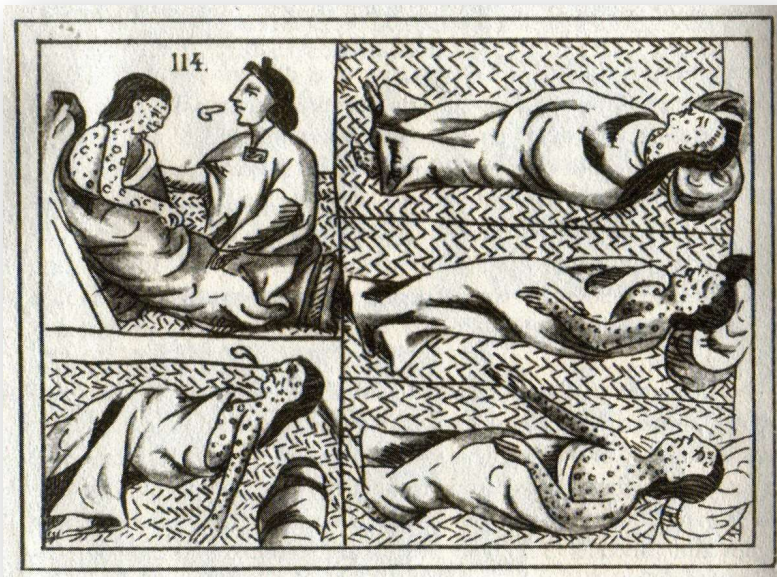
## 4 WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?



native peoples for transport, food, and other uses. One of the first European exports to the Americas, the horse, changed the lives of many Native American tribes in the mountains. They shifted to a nomadic lifestyle, as opposed to agriculture, based on hunting bison on horseback and moved down to the Great Plains. The existing Plains tribes expanded their territories with horses, and the animals were considered so valuable that horse herds became a measure of wealth.

Still, the effects of the introduction of European livestock on the environments and peoples of the New World were not always positive. In the Caribbean, the proliferation of European animals had large effects on native fauna and undergrowth and damaged conucos, plots managed by indigenous peoples for subsistence.

Often overlooked, even small animals had enormous effects on the Americas. Earthworms, for example, were brought in the soil of plants and transformed American forests. Earthworms are decomposers and can significantly change the pH of soil, resulting in changes to the native plants that can survive. As earthworms spread, whole landscapes changed. A time traveler might not recognize the forests of pre-Columbian America, nor realize that the forests we know today were so affected by this seemingly insignificant part of the Columbian Exchange.



Primary Source: Codex

A page from an Aztec codex depicting Native people dying from Smallpox, a disease that was unknown in the Americas before the Columbian Exchange

### MICROBES

Travelers between the Americas, Africa, and Europe also included microbes: silent, invisible life forms that had profound and devastating consequences. Native peoples had no immunity to diseases from across the Atlantic, to

## 4 WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?



which they had never been exposed. European explorers unwittingly brought with them chickenpox, measles, mumps, and smallpox, which ravaged native peoples despite their attempts to treat the diseases, decimating some populations and wholly destroying others. Of all the diseases brought from the Old World, smallpox was by far the greatest killer. Some researchers estimate that 90% of Native Americans died from this disease.

In eastern North America, some native peoples interpreted death from disease as a hostile act. Some groups, including the Iroquois, engaged in raids or “mourning wars,” taking enemy prisoners in order to assuage their grief and replace the departed. In a special ritual, the prisoners were “requickened”—assigned the identity of a dead person—and adopted by the bereaved family to take the place of their dead. As the toll from disease rose, mourning wars intensified and expanded.

### PEOPLE

A debate is currently raging among historians between those who argue for what is known as the “large count,” and those who espouse a “low count” of the pre-Columbian population of the Americas. Since evidence is poor, historians must do their best interpretations of the little there is to estimate how many Native Americans there actually were when Columbus arrived. This is not a purely academic question. Those who argue the high count side, are by extension arguing that many millions more Native Americans perished from disease than those who favor a low count. This raises many important ethical questions and questions identity, power, and justice that spill over into modern politics, especially in some countries where divisions between the native and non-native populations are pronounced.

We do know many Native American societies were swept with devastating diseases even when Europeans were not there to witness it. For example, the Spanish travelled up the Mississippi River in the early 1500s and reported seeing many villages. Roughly 100 years later when French explores traversed the same route, they reported none. It does not make sense that thousands of people would have abandoned their existence along an important waterway. What does make sense is that their lives were upended as microbes left behind by those first Spanish explorers wreaked havoc.

Countless people from the Old World eventually travelled to the Americas, but very few went in the other direction. Along with Europeans who came by choice, millions of Africans were brought to the New World as slaves.

The Spanish were the first Europeans to use enslaved Africans in the New World on islands such as Cuba and Hispaniola. The alarming death rate experienced by the indigenous population had spurred the first royal Spanish

## 4 WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?



laws protecting them, and consequently, the first enslaved Africans arrived in Hispaniola in 1501.

Increasing penetration into the Americas by the Portuguese created more demand for labor in Brazil—primarily for farming and mining. Slave-based economies quickly spread to the Caribbean and the southern portion of what is today the United States. There, Dutch traders brought the first enslaved Africans in 1619. These areas all developed an insatiable demand for slaves.

As European nations grew more powerful, especially Portugal, Spain, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands they began vying for control of the African slave trade, with little effect on local African and Arab trading. Great Britain's existing colonies in the Lesser Antilles and its effective naval control of the Mid-Atlantic forced other countries to abandon their enterprises due to inefficiency in cost. The English crown provided a charter giving the Royal African Company monopoly over the African slave routes until 1712.



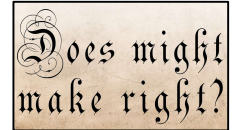
Primary Source: Illustration

A contemporary image of the sugar-growing region of Portuguese Brazil

The Atlantic slave trade peaked in the late 18th century, when the largest number of slaves was captured on raiding expeditions into the interior of West Africa. The expansion of European colonial powers to the New World increased the demand for slaves and made the slave trade much more lucrative to many West African powers, leading to the establishment of a number of West African empires that thrived on the slave trade.

Historians have widely debated the nature of the relationship between the African kingdoms and the European traders. Some researchers argue that it was an unequal relationship in which Africans were forced into a colonial trade with the more economically developed Europeans, exchanging raw materials and slaves for manufactured goods, and one that led to Africa being underdeveloped. Other researchers claim the Atlantic slave trade was

## 4 WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?



not as detrimental to various African economies as some historians purport, and that African nations at the time were well-positioned to compete with pre-industrial Europe.

### CONCLUSION

It is easy to point out the negative effects of the meeting of the Old and New Worlds, but we should not overlook the enormous positive changes that have resulted. It may seem like a small thing, but consider this: without the Columbian Exchange, we would not have pizza – flour for the dough is from the Old World and tomatoes are from the New.

When it comes to the Columbian Exchange, blame seems like a frivolous exercise. The Europeans whose actions brought on the exchange had no idea what they were unleashing. They did not have any understanding of invasive species and had not invented science, let alone discovered microbes or come to understand the true causes of disease.

So, a more appropriate question is to consider the effects of the exchange in terms of the course of world history. It certainly resulted in irreversible change. But what do you think?

Was the Columbian Exchange a net benefit for humanity



Secondary Source: Illustration

A simple graphic shows some of the wide variety of plants, animals, and microbes shared between the Old World and New World as a result of the Columbian Exchange.

## 4 WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE A NET BENEFIT FOR HUMANITY?



### SUMMARY

The Columbian Exchange is the name historians give to all the plants, animals, diseases, people and ideas shared between the Old World of Europe, Asia and Africa and the New World of the Americas after first contact was made by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Since this exchange was enormously influential, 1492 is an important turning point in world history.

Sugar and rice were brought from the Old World to the New. Tobacco, potatoes, tomatoes and chocolate were New World crops brought to the Old World.

Domesticated animals such as horses, pigs, cows, sheep, goats and chickens were brought to America. Europeans also brought earthworms, which transformed the forests and fields of the Americas.

Most significantly for Native Americans was the exchange of diseases. Smallpox came from Europe and devastated Native American populations. It is estimated that 90% of Native Americans died from introduced diseases.

People were also part of the Columbian Exchange. Some came by choice, such as the Spanish, French and eventually the British colonists. Others did not come by choice, such as the African slaves. Once in America, some remained racially segregated whereas in other colonies they intermarried. The Spanish developed a caste system based on the purity of one's heritage, with those of pure Spanish ancestry at the top, and those of pure African ancestry at the bottom.



### KEY CONCEPTS

**Columbian Exchange:** Name given to the mixing of animals, plants, microbes, people and ideas between the Old World and New World after Columbus's first voyage in 1492.

# Does might make right?

History is written by the victors. This is a true of American history as it is of any other study of the past. Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we look back on our past and face questions about what we have done, and what those who came before us have done. It is our job to make sense of it all. What stories are worth telling? Whose story is worth telling? Why do these stories matter to us? Do they tell us about our identity, our ideals, or our dreams? Do they advance a political position? Are the things the people in the past did to put us where we are now justified?

Sometimes the hardest thing about studying the past is to consider those who lost out. How do we feel about them? If things had turned out differently, the world we live in now would be different. We might not even be here.

Being mighty can help you get your way, but is having the power to get your way mean that you should? The study of the encounters between Europeans, Africans and Native Americans is often the story of winning and losing, of wealth and destruction, of triumph and disease. We cannot change the past. Those who were mighty in the past won, and those who were weaker, for whatever reason, lost.

But, can we look at the world with a Darwinian view. Should the fittest survive and thrive?

What do you think? Does might make right?



[www.inquiryhistory.com](http://www.inquiryhistory.com)