

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

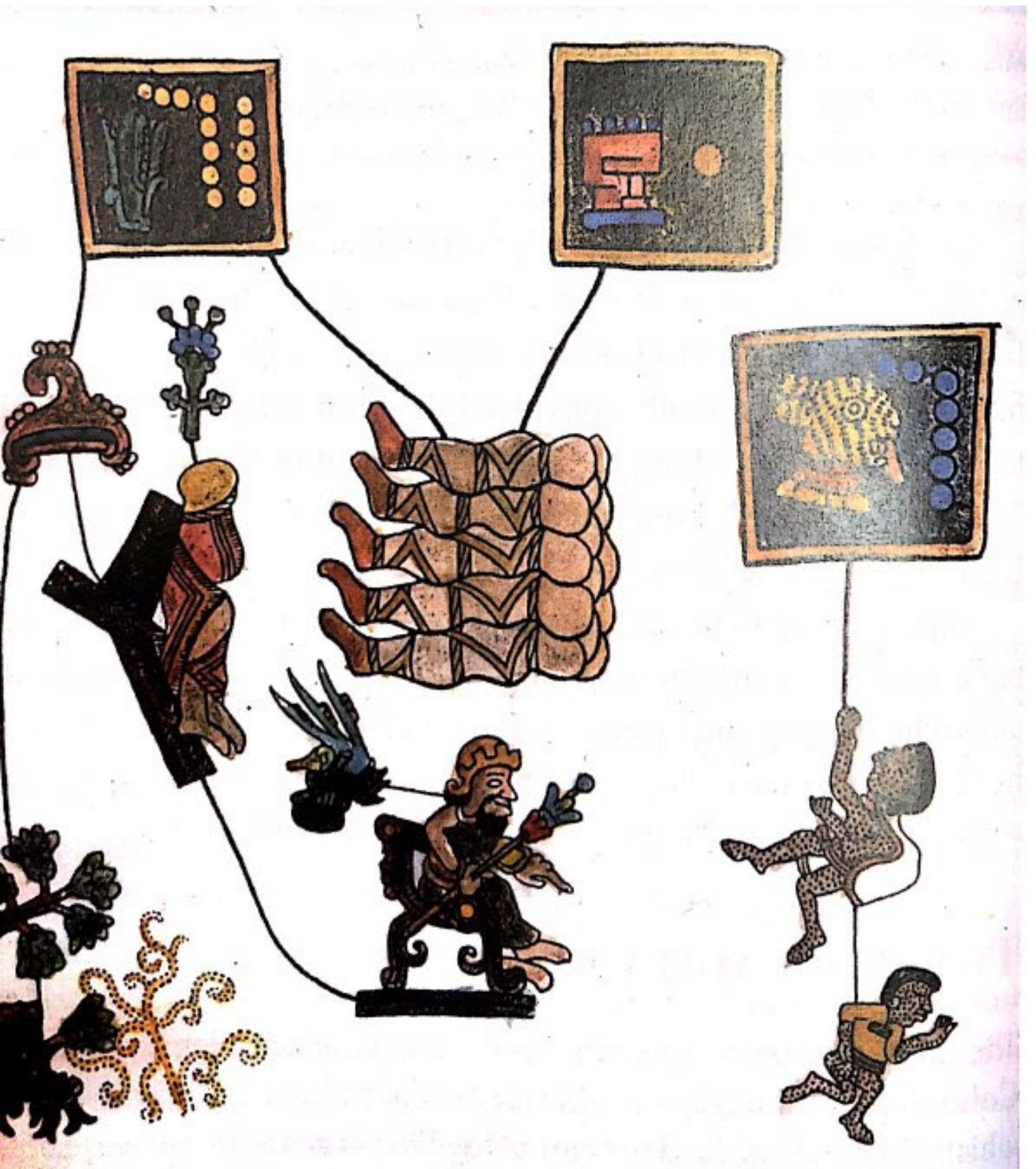
Las Casas spent the next fifty years advocating better treatment for indigenous people, earning the title “Protector of the Indians.” He urged that the Indians be converted to Catholicism only through “peaceful and reasonable” means, and he eventually convinced the monarchy and the Catholic Church to issue new rules calling for better treatment of the Indians. Still, the use of “fire and the sword” continued, and angry colonists on Hispaniola banished Las Casas from the island.

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

THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

The first European contacts with the Western Hemisphere began the **Columbian Exchange**, a worldwide transfer of plants, animals, and diseases, which ultimately worked in favor of the Europeans at the expense of the indigenous peoples.

The plants and animals of the two worlds differed more than the peoples. Europeans had never encountered iguanas, buffaloes,



diets and spurred a dramatic increase in the European population, which in turn helped provide the restless, adventurous young people who would colonize the New World.

AN EXCHANGE OF DISEASES The most significant immediate aspect of the Columbian Exchange was, by far, the transmission of **infectious diseases**. During the three centuries after Columbus's first voyage, Europeans and enslaved Africans brought deadly diseases that Native Americans had never encountered: smallpox, typhus, malaria, mumps, chickenpox, and measles. The results were catastrophic. By 1568, just seventy-five years after Columbus's first voyage, infectious diseases had killed 80 to 90 percent of the Indian population—the greatest loss of human life in history.

Smallpox was an especially ghastly killer. In central Mexico alone, some 8 million people, perhaps a third of the entire Indian population, died of smallpox within a decade of the arrival of the Spanish. Unable to explain or cure the diseases, Native American chieftains and religious leaders often lost their stature—and their lives—as they were usually the first to meet the Spanish and thus were the first infected. As a consequence of losing their leaders, the indigenous peoples were less able to resist the European invaders. Many Europeans, however, interpreted such epidemics as diseases sent by God to punish those who resisted conversion to Christianity.

THE SPANISH IN NORTH AMERICA

Throughout the sixteenth century, no European power other than Spain held more than a brief foothold in the Americas. Spanish explorers had not only arrived first but also had stumbled onto those regions that would produce the quickest profits. While France and England were preoccupied with political disputes and religious conflict, Catholic Spain had forged an authoritarian national and religious unity that enabled it to dominate Europe as well as the New World.

HISPANIC AMERICA

For most of the colonial period, much of what is now the United States, from the Southwest and California across the continent to Florida, an area larger than western Europe, was governed by Spain. Spanish culture etched a lasting imprint upon America's future ways of life. Hispanic place-names—San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Fe, San Antonio, Pensacola, St. Augustine—survive to this day, as do Hispanic influences in art, architecture, literature, music, law, and food.

ST. AUGUSTINE In 1513, Juan Ponce de León, then governor of Puerto Rico, made the earliest known European exploration of Florida, hoping to find gold and Indian slaves. Meanwhile, Spanish explorers sailed along the Gulf coast from Florida to Mexico, scouted the Atlantic coast all the way to Canada, and established a short-lived colony on the Carolina coast.

In 1539, Hernando de Soto and 620 conquistadores landed on the western shore of La Florida (Land of Flowers) and soon set out on horseback, armored and mounted on horses, with fighting dogs and herds of pigs in tow, to search for riches. Instead of gold, they found "great fields of corn, beans and squash . . . as far as the eye could see."

De Soto, who a companion said was "fond of the sport of killing Indians," led the expedition north as far as western North Carolina, and then moved westward across Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, before happening upon the Mississippi River near what today is Memphis. After crossing the Mississippi, the conquistadores went up the Arkansas River, looting and destroying Indian villages along the way. In the spring of 1542, de Soto died near Natchez, Mississippi; the next year, the survivors among his party floated down the Mississippi River, and 311 of the original adventurers, barely alive and eager to be rid of America, made their way to Spanish Mexico.

In 1565, in response to French efforts to colonize north Florida, the Spanish king dispatched Pedro Menendez de Aviles to lead a ragtag group of 1,500 soldiers and colonists in founding an outpost on the Florida coast. St. Augustine became the first permanent European settlement in the present-day United States. The Spanish created St. Augustine in response to French efforts to colonize north Florida. In the 1560s, French Protestant refugees (called Huguenots) established France's first American colonies, one on the coast of what became South Carolina and the other in Florida. The settlements did not last long.

At dawn on September 20, 1565, some 500 Spanish soldiers from St. Augustine assaulted Fort Caroline, the French Huguenot colony in northeastern Florida, and hanged all the men over age fifteen. Only women, girls, and young boys were spared. The Spanish commander notified his Catholic king that he had killed all the French he "had found [in Fort Caroline] because . . . they were scattering the odious Lutheran doctrine in these Provinces." Later, when survivors from a shipwrecked French fleet washed ashore on Florida beaches after a hurricane, the Spanish commander told them they must abandon Protestantism and swear their allegiance to Catholicism. When they refused, his soldiers killed 245 of them.

THE SPANISH SOUTHWEST The Spanish eventually established other permanent settlements in what are now New Mexico, Texas, and California.

From the outset, however, the settlements were sparsely populated, inadequately supplied, dreadfully poor, and consistently neglected by Spanish colonial officials.

In New Spain, civil liberties and notions of equal treatment were nonexistent; people were expected to follow orders. Colonists enjoyed no freedom of speech, religion, or movement; no local elections; no real self-government. The military officers, bureaucrats, wealthy landowners, and priests appointed by the king regulated every detail of colonial life. Settlers could not travel within the colonies without official permission.

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

In 1598, the caravan of 250 colonists, including women, children, horses, goats, sheep, and 7,000 cattle, began moving north from the mountains above Mexico City across the harsh desert landscape. “O God! What a lonely land!” one traveler wrote to relatives in Mexico City.

After walking more than 800 miles in seven months, along ancient Indian footpaths that Spanish settlers called the *Camino Real* (royal road), they established the colony of New Mexico, the farthest outpost of New Spain. It took wagon trains eighteen months to travel to Mexico City and back. The Spanish labeled the local Indians “Pueblos” (a Spanish word meaning village) for the city-like aspect of their terraced, multistoried buildings, sometimes chiseled into the steep walls of cliffs. The Pueblos (mostly Hopis and Zunis) were farmers who used irrigation to water their crops. “Their corn and vegetables,” Oñate reported, “are the best and largest to be found anywhere in the world.”

Hopis, Zunis, and other Pueblo peoples sought peace rather than war, yet they were often raided by Apaches (from a Pueblo word meaning “enemy”). “Their government,” Oñate noted, “is one of complete freedom, for although they have chieftains, they obey them badly and in few matters.”

The goals of Spanish colonialism were to find gold, silver, and other valuable commodities while forcing the Native Americans to adopt the Spanish religion and way of life. Oñate, New Mexico’s first governor, told the Pueblos that if they embraced Catholicism and followed his orders, they would receive “an eternal life of great bliss” instead of “cruel and everlasting torment.”

There was, however, little gold or silver in New Mexico. Nor was there enough corn and beans to feed the Spanish invaders, who had to be resupplied by caravans traveling for months from Mexico City. Oñate eventually forced Indians to pay annual tributes (taxes) to the Spanish authorities in the form of a yard of cloth and a bushel of corn each year.

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

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

would become a parish church, and the inhabitants would be given full Spanish citizenship—including the privilege of paying taxes. Some Indians welcomed the Spanish as “powerful witches” capable of easing their burdens. Others tried to use the European invaders as allies against rival Indian groups. Still others rebelled. Before the end of New Mexico’s first year of Spanish rule, in December 1598, the Acoma Pueblo revolted, killing eleven soldiers and two servants.

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



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

THE MESTIZO FACTOR Few Spanish women journeyed to New Spain in the sixteenth century. Those who did had to be married and accompanied by a husband. As a result, there were so few Spanish women in North America that the government encouraged soldiers and settlers to marry Native Americans and did not discriminate against the children (*mestizos*) of the mixed marriages.

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

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

In fact, however, resentment among the Indians increased as the Spanish stripped them of their ancestral ways of life. “The heathen,” reported a Spanish soldier, “have conceived a mortal hatred for our holy faith and enmity [hatred] for the Spanish nation.”

In 1680, a charismatic Indian spiritual leader named Popé (meaning “Ripe Plantings”) organized a massive rebellion of warriors from nineteen villages. The Indians, painted for war, burned Catholic churches; tortured, mutilated, and executed 21 priests and 400 Spanish settlers; destroyed all relics of Christianity; and forced the 2,400 survivors to flee. The entire province of New Mexico was again in Indian hands, leading the Spanish governor to report that the Pueblos “are very happy without religion or Spaniards.”

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

HORSES AND THE GREAT PLAINS

Another major consequence of the Pueblo Revolt was the opportunity it gave Indian rebels to acquire Spanish horses. (Spanish authorities had made it illegal for Indians to ride or own horses). The Pueblos established a thriving horse

trade, first with the Navajos and Apaches, and then with other tribes. By 1690, horses were in Texas, and soon they spread across the Great Plains.

Before the arrival of horses, Indians had hunted on foot and used dogs as their beasts of burden. Dogs are carnivores, however, and it was difficult to find enough meat to feed them. The vast grasslands of the Great Plains were the perfect environment for horses, since the prairies offered plenty of forage.

Acquiring horses gave the Indians on the Great Plains a new source of mobility and power. Horses could haul up to seven times as much weight as dogs; their speed and endurance made the Indians much more effective hunters and warriors. Horses grew so valuable that they became a form of Indian currency and a sign of wealth and prestige. On the Great Plains, a warrior's status reflected the number of horses he owned. The more horses, the more wives he could support and the more buffalo robes he could exchange for more horses.

By the late seventeenth century, horse-mounted Indians were fighting the Spaniards on more equal terms. This helps explain why the Indians of the Southwest and Texas, unlike the Indians in Mexico, were able to sustain their cultures for the next 300 years. On horseback, they were among the most fearsome fighters in the world.



BUFFALO HUNTING The Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, Kiowa, and Sioux reinvented themselves as horse-centered cultures. They left their traditional woodland villages and became nomadic buffalo hunters.

A bull buffalo (Spaniards called them cows with long beards) could weigh more than a ton and stand five feet tall at the shoulder. Indians used virtually every part of the buffalo: meat for food; hides for clothing, shoes, bedding, and shelter; muscles and tendons for thread and bowstrings; intestines for containers; bones for tools; horns for eating utensils; hair for headdresses; and dung for fuel. They used tongues for hair brushes and tails for fly swatters. One scholar has referred to the buffalo as the “tribal department store.”

Women and girls butchered and dried the buffalo meat and tanned the hides. As the value of the hides grew, Indian hunters began practicing polygamy, because more wives could process more buffalo carcasses. The rising value of wives eventually led Plains Indians to raid other tribes in search of brides.

The introduction of horses on the Great Plains was a mixed blessing; they brought prosperity and mobility but also triggered more conflicts among the Plains Indians. Over time, the Indians on horseback eventually killed more buffaloes than the herds could replace. Further, horses competed with the buffaloes for food, often depleting the prairie grass. Horse-centered cultures enabled Indians to travel greater distances and encounter more people. As a consequence, infectious diseases spread more widely. Still, the arrival of horses improved the quality of life in many ways. By 1800, a white trader in Texas would observe that “this is a delightful country, and were it not for perpetual wars, the natives might be the happiest people on earth.”

THE SPANISH EMPIRE IN DECLINE

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

Yet the Spanish rulers overreached. The religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries killed millions, created intense anti-Spanish feelings among the English and Dutch, and eventually helped bankrupt the Spanish government. At the same time, the Spanish Empire grew so large that its size and complexity overtaxed the government’s resources.

During the sixteenth century, New Spain gradually developed into a settled society with the same rigid class structure of the home country. New Spain was essentially an extractive empire, less interested in creating self-sustaining colonial communities than in removing gold, silver, and copper while enslaving the indigenous peoples and converting them to Christianity. Spain never encouraged vast numbers of settlers to populate New Spain.

Spain's colonial system was mostly disastrous for the peoples of Africa and the Americas. For three centuries after Columbus arrived in the New World, the Spanish explorers, conquistadores, and priests imposed Catholicism on the native peoples as well as a cruel system of economic exploitation and dependence. As Bartolomé de Las Casas concluded, "The Spaniards have shown not the slightest consideration for these people, treating them (and I speak from first-hand experience, having been there from the outset) . . . as piles of dung in the middle of the road. They have had as little concern for their souls as for their bodies." In the end, the lust for empire ("God, Glory, and Gold") brought decadence and decline to Spain and much of Europe.

CHALLENGES TO THE SPANISH EMPIRE

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

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

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

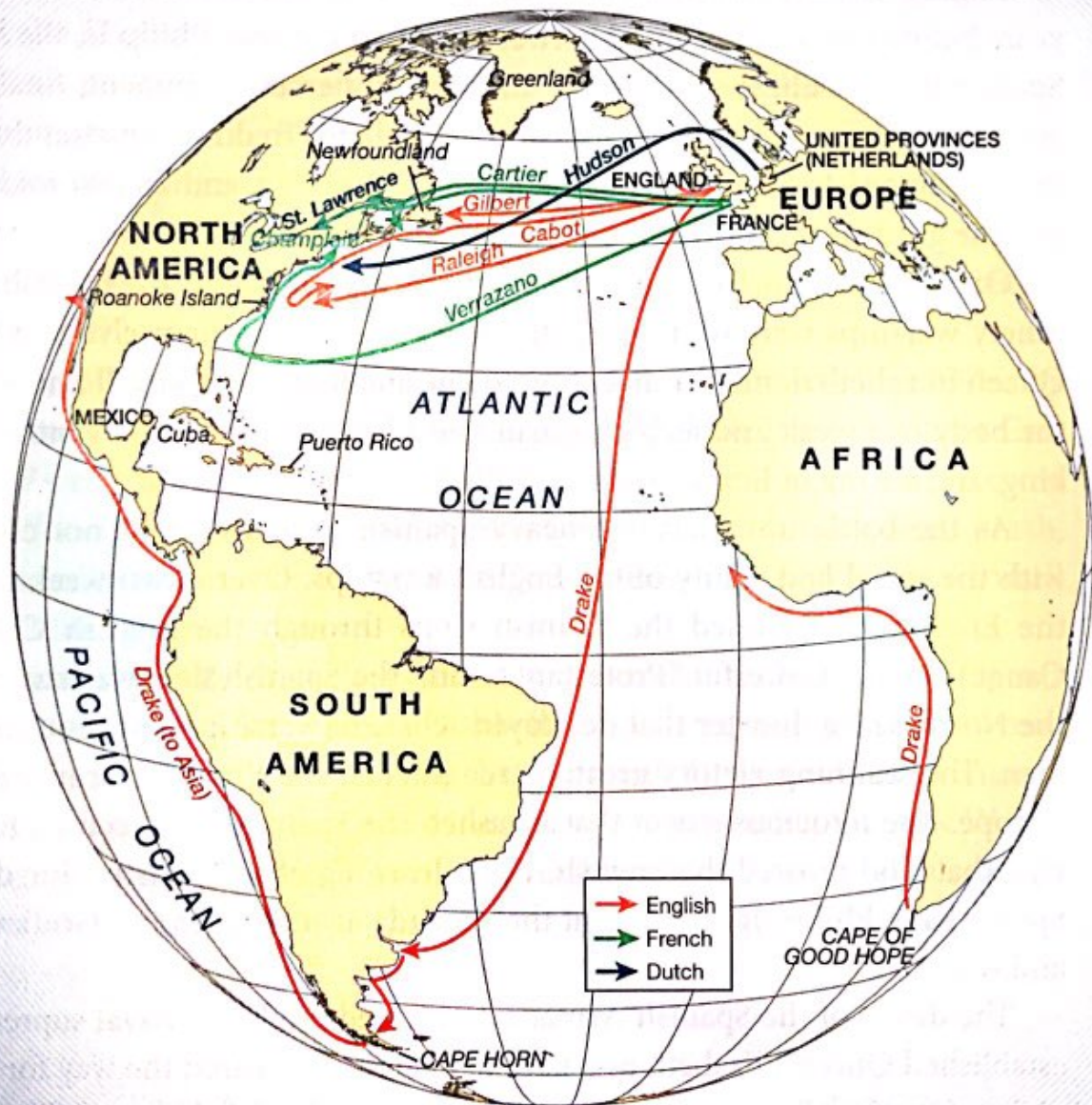
France after midcentury, however, plunged into religious civil wars, and the colonization of Canada had to await the arrival of Samuel de Champlain, "the Father of New France," after 1600. Over thirty-seven years, Champlain would lead twenty-seven expeditions from France to Canada—and never lose a ship.

THE DUTCH REVOLT From the mid-1500s, greater threats to Spanish power in the New World arose from the Dutch and the English. In 1566, the Netherlands included seventeen provinces. The fragmented nation had passed

by inheritance to the Spanish king in 1555, but the Dutch spurned Catholicism and had become largely Protestant (mostly Calvinists making up the Dutch Reformed Church). During the second half of the sixteenth century, the Dutch began a series of rebellions against Spanish Catholic rule.

A long, bloody struggle ensued in which Queen Elizabeth aided the Dutch, sending some 8,000 English soldiers to support their efforts. The Dutch revolt, as much a civil war as a war for national independence, was a series of different uprisings in different provinces at different times. Each province had its own institutions, laws, and rights. Although seven provinces joined together

ENGLISH, FRENCH, AND DUTCH EXPLORATIONS



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

to form the Dutch Republic, the Spanish did not officially recognize the independence of the entire Netherlands until 1648.

THE DEFEAT OF THE ARMADA Almost from the beginning of the Protestant revolt in the Netherlands, the Dutch captured Spanish treasure ships in the Atlantic and carried on illegal trade with Spain's colonies. While England's Queen Elizabeth steered a tortuous course to avoid open war with Spain, she desperately sought additional resources to defend her island nation. She encouraged English privateers such as Sir Francis Drake to attack Spanish ships and their coastal colonies in America, leading the Spanish to call her the "pirate queen."

English raids on Spanish ships and settlements continued for some twenty years before open war erupted between the two nations. Philip II, the king of Spain who was Elizabeth's brother-in-law and fiercest opponent, finally had enough and began plotting an invasion of England. To do so, he assembled the massive **Spanish Armada**: 132 warships, 8,000 sailors, and 18,000 soldiers. It was the greatest invasion fleet in history to that point.

On May 28, 1588, the Armada began sailing for England. The English navy's ninety warships were waiting. As the fleets positioned themselves for battle, Queen Elizabeth donned a silver breastplate and told her forces, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a King of England too."

As the battle unfolded, the heavy Spanish galleons could not compete with the speed and agility of the English warships. Over a two-week period, the English fleet chased the Spanish ships through the English Channel. Caught up in a powerful "Protestant wind," the Spanish fleet was swept into the North Sea, a disaster that destroyed scores of warships and thousands of men. The stunning victory greatly strengthened the Protestant cause across Europe. The ferocious storm that smashed the Spanish fleet seemed to be a sign that God favored the English. Upon learning of the catastrophic defeat, Spain's King Philip sighed, "I sent the Armada against men, not God's winds and waves."

The defeat of the Spanish Armada confirmed England's naval supremacy, established Queen Elizabeth as a national hero, and cleared the way for colonizing America's "remote heathens and barbarous lands." Although Elizabeth had many suitors eager to marry her, she refused to divide her power. She would have "but one mistress [England] and no master." By the end of the sixteenth century, Elizabethan England had begun an epic transformation from a poor, humiliated, and isolated nation into a mighty global empire.

ENGLISH EXPLORATION OF AMERICA

English efforts to colonize America began a few years before the battle with the Spanish Armada. In 1584, Queen Elizabeth asked Sir Walter Raleigh to organize a colonizing mission on the North American coast. His expedition discovered the Outer Banks of North Carolina and landed at Roanoke Island. Raleigh named the area Virginia, in honor of Elizabeth, the "Virgin Queen."

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

White's journey back to Virginia was delayed because of the naval war with Spain. When he finally returned, in 1590, the Roanoke colony had been abandoned and pillaged. On a post at the entrance to the village, someone had carved the word "CROATOAN," leading White to conclude that the settlers had set out for the island of that name some fifty miles south, where friendly Indians lived.

The English never found the "lost colonists." They may have been killed by Indians or Spaniards. The most recent evidence indicates that the "Lost Colony" suffered from a horrible drought that prevented the settlers from growing enough food to survive. While some may have gone south, most went north, to the southern shores of Chesapeake Bay, where they lived for years until Indians killed them.

Whatever the fate of the lost colonists, there were no English settlements in North America when Queen Elizabeth died in 1603. The Spanish controlled the only colonial outposts on the continent. This was about to change, however. Inspired by the success of the Spanish in exploiting the New World, the English—as well as the French and Dutch—would soon develop colonial empires of their own.