

# America Before the English Colonies

Native Americans lived in North America long before it was discovered by Columbus. What happened here before European settlers arrived?



## Chapter 1: The New World

### In the Beginning

Where did the very first inhabitants of North America and South America come from? Who were they, why did they come, when did they come, and how did they get here? No one knows for sure. Perhaps the most likely scenario is that Native Americans came from Siberia.

About 15 thousand years ago (during an ice age) ice formed a land mass connecting Siberia with Alaska. Those Siberians chased their large-animal prey across what became known as the *Bering Strait*. Even after the ice melted, Siberians made their way to Alaska by boat. Today, the Bering Strait narrows to as little as three miles between Russia and Alaska.

The Siberians probably had no idea they were venturing onto a new continent, at least not at first. As far as they were concerned, they were still on their home turf, even if they happened to be the first ones there. They gradually made their way south through Alaska, and then, unlike the Europeans who would arrive thousands of years later, these seminal Native Americans spread out to the south and east, instead of westward. And unlike the European newcomers, these earliest North Americans had no concept of Manifest Destiny. Around nine thousand years ago, there were 100,000 people from Alaska to the southern tip of South America. Around three thousand years ago, there were probably one million Native Americans on the two continents.

Except for Antarctica, North and South America were the last continents with human inhabitants. As these Native Americans slowly spread out across North America and into South America, they adapted to the environments they found. The climate and natural resources at each location largely determined the customs, culture, and economy of each group. They had developed at least 375 languages by 1492. In the Pacific Northwest and northern California, rapid cultural diversity led to about 500 communities with 50 distinct languages.

Native American communities were not isolated. Trade networks evolved which facilitated the exchange of objects, ideas, and innovations over long distances. Still, at least for thousands of years, Native Americans did not think of themselves as members of a larger group called *Indians*.

They slowly turned from hunting large animals to horticulture, at least in areas where it was practical. They figured out how to irrigate the arid areas of the American Southwest and Mexico. Farther east, they didn't need to bother with that, because there was plenty of rain. It was in central Mexico where Indians developed maize, squashes, and beans -- the staple crops of North American horticulture.

More food resulted in more people. As horticulture allowed (or forced) them to stay in one location for longer periods of time, and as it required considerable coordinated labor, communities developed. And as they developed, so did economic differentiation and a social order. For example, food surpluses provided time for people to begin to develop specialized skills, as merchants, craftsmen, priests, and rulers.

Horticulture, however, was not the key to success in all regions. Some early Native Americans lived in areas where there was not enough rain, or the growing season was too short. They continued to live in small, mobile groups, and after about 500 CE they adopted the bow-and-arrow for more efficient hunting.

Horticulture did not take center stage in the coastal areas of California or the Pacific northwest, either, but not because of low rainfall or a short growing season. They simply didn't need to develop horticulture there, because fishing, hunting, and gathering provided an abundance of food. In the Pacific Northwest, they had so much food that they could afford to spend time developing art, elaborate rituals, and status hierarchies.

### Early Cultural Complexes

The cultural center of the North American continent was Mexico. Those Mesoamericans strongly influenced the two most prominent cultural complexes in the American Southwest -- referred to by scholars as the *Hohokam* and the *Anasazi*. Each consisted of many politically independent towns

(pueblos), and several linguistic groups. Each had stone and adobe structures, and a social hierarchy headed by men who served as both chief and priest.

The Hohokam and Anasazi traded with central Mexicans, who taught their northern neighbors about their crops, one of which was cotton, used for weaving cloth. Neither culture used the wheel yet, nor did they have a system for writing.

During the 12th and 13th centuries both cultures experience severe crises. They relied heavily on maize, which is highly productive, but which also depletes the soil quickly. Using the same fields for maize season after season led to reduced yields and crop failures. At the same time, they were dealing with overpopulation. In addition, they were suffering through a prolonged drought. These factors led to malnutrition, disease, violence, and loss of confidence in their chief / priest leaders. In the 13th century, they abandoned their towns, dispersed, and reverted to a hunter-gatherer mobile lifestyle.

Meanwhile, to the east, the Mississippian people flourished. Along the Mississippi Valley, people didn't need irrigation, because they had a mild climate with plenty of rainfall. They didn't need horticulture, either, at least at first, because of the abundance of wild plants and animals. Hunting, fishing, and gathering were sufficient until about 800 CE, when they turned to the trinity of maize, beans, and squashes. Once they adopted a horticultural lifestyle in an area so ideally suited for it, population quickly quadrupled, and the Mississippi Valley became the most populous area north of central Mexico.

Like the Hohokam and Anasazi, Mississippians were heavily influenced by Mesoamericans. Towns were built around plazas, which included earthen pyramids, which supported wooden temples, which also served as homes for the chiefs. These chiefs were regarded as godlike relatives of their principal deity, the sun, which was responsible for crops. Common people built the town and supported their local chief. The local chief, in turn, paid tribute to the chief chief, who could be found on the largest pyramid in the region's biggest town.

Certain towns would rise to prominence for a century or two, then another would assume dominance. Chiefdoms were always at war, never united, resulting in chronic instability. When a chief was buried, his wives and servants were killed and buried right beside him – companions for afterlife.

The Mississippians' largest and wealthiest center was just east of St Louis. Known today as *Cahokia*, it was developed between 900 and 1100 CE, supported a population of between 10 and 40 thousand, covered about six square miles, consisted of hundreds of thatched houses and about 100 earthen temple and burial mounds, and was surrounded by a stockade. The third-largest pyramid in North America was located there, 110 feet high, covering 16 acres. On its flattened pinnacle was a wooden temple with a thatched roof on top and the town's preeminent chief within, along with his family and servants.

Generally speaking, Cahokia declined at roughly the same time as the Hohokam and Anasazi cultures, in the same way, and for the same reasons. But the Mississippian culture still thrived in other towns, including Moundville in Alabama, Etowah in Georgia, and Spiro in eastern Oklahoma. The Spanish were impressed by it when they arrived. One of them observed: **That country is populous and abundant.**

These three cultural complexes contradict the current myth of Indians as environmental saints. But they were the exceptions, not the general pattern. North of central Mexico, most Native Americans were more dispersed, living in smaller, more mobile bands that did not impact their local environment harshly. Any abuse of nature produced negative impacts which were felt quickly and responded to quickly, either by relocating or by adopting alternative strategies.

## Melting the Pot

Initial native North American encounters with European colonizers generally corresponded with colonial advances northward and westward. In 1776 that process was well advanced in the east, along the Atlantic coast and in the Caribbean, but it was just beginning on the Pacific rim, where it continued until about 1820.

It wasn't only westward-bound British colonizers that Native Americans encountered after 1492. It was also, for example, Spanish heading north from Mexico, Russians heading eastward from Siberia, French along the Mississippi and around the Great Lakes, Dutch in what became New York, and African slaves. Within those groups were abundant subgroups. The British included Welsh, Scotch, and Irish. A Londoner could barely understand an English rural peasant. Indians themselves spoke hundreds of different languages. They were the most diverse group of all.

North America became a giant crucible in which thousands of disparate languages, cultures, religious beliefs, skin colors, customs, philosophies, hopes, fears, dreams, and abilities were ground together, eventually forming a compound known as America. Radically diverse peoples were thrown together, forced to try to understand each other, to communicate, to cooperate, to get along peacefully. It was usually done under extremely stressful circumstances. It was an unprecedented intermingling of people, plants, animals, microbes, cultures, languages, customs, and goals, all borrowing from each other, adapting, evolving, and gradually forming a composite entirely different than any of its component parts.

While all these men may have been born equal, they didn't necessarily stay that way for long. The Europeans had tremendous advantages over the natives, including technological and organizational superiority. So Indians had to do most of the adjusting and adapting, but Europeans never achieved total dominance over them, as they did Africans.

In the early years, European superiority and domination was based on their advanced culture and technology, not on race. Christians, especially, saw themselves as the elites. Europeans considered their own peasants and laborers as only slightly superior to Indians and Africans, which meant that it was possible for Indians and Africans, through cultural indoctrination and acceptance of Christianity, to improve their status to at least equality with European lower classes.

The English were much more inclined to emphasize skin color than the French or Spanish. So, in British

America there developed a strong correlation between race and political power. As the basis of privilege shifted from class to race, common white men achieved a greater level of social respect and political rights. Their increased freedom and opportunity resulted from the expanded opportunities of all white men to exploit and dominate a broad range of "inferior" peoples.

## Cultural Contrasts

Until the Europeans arrived, Natives didn't know what they didn't have. As long as they didn't know, they had no reason to be concerned about their profound disadvantages.

They had no steel weapons or armor, no gunpowder, no windmills, no watermills, no domesticated animals other than dogs. Wheels were toys they had seen in central Mexico. Their maritime adventures were limited to canoes and rafts. The only system of writing was restricted to a few Mesoamerican elites, so there was no permanent communication or record-keeping. They had no ideology or curiosity that drove them to explore much beyond their small known world. (They were also profoundly lacking in diseases, but the Europeans had a quick cure for that).

Europeans in Columbus' time, on the other hand, had a wide array of domesticated plants and animals, advanced agricultural practices, written communication and records, the most advanced maritime technology in the world, powerful military skills and technology, very strong religious beliefs, a cornucopia of diseases, and ambition out the wazoo.

While Europeans embraced Christianity, Indians had no comparable organized religion. That didn't make them atheists per se, although Europeans would not be too concerned about the distinction. If they were not Christians, and they clearly were not, then they must be pagans, and they must be persuaded or coerced to become Christians. To Europeans, that's all there was to it.

The label applied to Indian beliefs is *animism*. They made no distinction between the natural and the supernatural. They were interwoven into a very complex system in which everything in the natural world had a spiritual or supernatural component.

Things were also beings, and beings had various measures of power. Power pulsed, ebbed, flowed, and varied in concentration through every object and being in the natural world, interacting in ways that Europeans could not begin to fathom.

Indians saw themselves as simply one part of that intricate, interactive dynamic. Encounters with non-human objects was a social experience, because objects were more like than unlike humans, and they could, in fact, morph into human forms at times. The key to successful and peaceful interaction was *reciprocity*. That meant, among other things, minimizing waste and exercising ecological restraint.

It was necessary to kill fish and animals for food. It made good sense to clear trees for fields. But Native Americans proceeded with caution, wary of offending the affected spirits and provoking some sort of supernatural counterattack. Fishing and hunting excesses, for example, could result in crop failures or destructive wind storms. The spiritual world was volatile, dangerous, and often unpredictable. So a good crop, a successful hunt, an abundance of fish – all such gifts of nature were to be accepted only with utmost gratitude and humility.

But that wasn't always enough to assure survival or prosperity. Sometimes existence in this perplexing process required a bit of trickery or manipulation. At other times, soothing or mollifying the spirits was a more appropriate approach. Visions and fasting were among the tools of the trade, and visions sometimes came in the form of dreams. Natives considered the dreamworld of nighttime even more real and powerful than their daytime existence.

The most skilled and experienced Natives became *shamans* – intermediaries between humans and inanimate objects. They could perform special rituals, heal or inflict illness, predict and sometimes influence the future. Even their superior abilities weren't always enough to maintain the proper reciprocal balance. But, overall, the end result was a great respect for and harmony with nature. Indians were not primarily motivated by ecological concerns, but the environment benefited from their religious beliefs just the same.

The enigmatic religious beliefs of Indians, along with their strange rituals, customs, and practices, made them appear primitive and evil to the white man. Europeans considered shamans to be witches, and Indian religious beliefs were seen to be of the devil. Meanwhile, the natives, even with their profound lack of technology, considered themselves more intelligent and resourceful than their pale-face cousins.

In the European mind, the line of demarcation between human life and everything else in the natural world was clear and distinct. They were, therefore, free to harvest all natural resources without fear of offending the spirits or provoking their wrath. Not only did they have the right to fully exploit the world's natural resources, they were obligated to do so. After all, the Bible (in the book of Genesis) tasks mankind to subdue the earth and have dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth.

As far as the European late arrivers to the Western Hemisphere were concerned, Native Americans had failed to live up to that Biblical mandate. That proved European superiority, and it fully justified their dominance over the Natives. In fact, it meant that Indians were really nothing more than one of the natural resources to be exploited.

Christopher Columbus wasted no time exercising his European responsibilities and Christian duty to have dominion over every living thing. On his return trip to Spain, he took Indian slaves with him. The Queen at first was appalled at the idea of one human being presuming to own another. But her reservations quickly evaporated when she realized the enormous profits to be made in the slavery business.

That early act by Christopher Columbus spoke volumes to Indians about the nature of Europeans. The Native American "discovery" of Europeans had begun. The white man was there to take whatever he could find of value, including humans. Superior culture and technology compelled Europeans to take control of the Western hemisphere, and their religion compelled them to convert the pagan Native Americans to Christianity, whether they liked it or not.

But Christianity played a dual role. On the one hand, it provided Europeans with carte-blanche authority to exploit and dominate the Western Hemisphere. They would accomplish that, in part, through capitalism. But unrestrained capitalism eventually destroys itself by its own excesses. Christianity provided the necessary restraint on capitalism. Thomas Shepard, a 17th century English minister explained it with this metaphor: Capitalism is a raging sea which tends to inundate everyone and everything. Christianity provides its banks.

So, from an early European perspective, Christianity provided both a raging sea and the shores to contain it.

## **Old and New Worlds Both Change**

While the European discovery of the Western Hemisphere had a profound impact on Native Americans, it also ended up having a profound impact on Europe.

In spite of all the newcomers, the population of North America decreased from 1492 to 1776. Diseases imported from the Old World, and wars, killed Indians faster than immigrants could replace them. And during the 18th century, most of the newcomers were not Europeans looking for adventure or a new start. They were African slaves.

Meanwhile, as Europeans made dramatic leaps in maritime technology and put it to good use, they transformed the Atlantic into their superhighway to the world. They began to establish fortified outposts on distant coasts, allowing them to dominate local trade, leading eventually to transoceanic empires. As European understanding of geography expanded, so did their knowledge and practical applications of science, technology, warfare, and commerce, which further strengthened their control over their distant outposts, and extended their reach to even more distant shores. Those new extensions, then, brought new riches and led to greater knowledge and new discoveries, which were translated into practical applications and improvements.

Columbus' discovery of the Americas, and other explorers' discovery of a new route to Asia, elevated the status of Europe from a backwater

continent to a world power. Western Europe and North America could hardly have been more different. Yet as soon as Europeans became aware of the differences, they set in motion forces which began to diminish those differences in profound and unforeseeable ways.

Before Columbus' arrival, the Atlantic had served as a barrier between the two continents (Europe and North America). But Europeans brought with them new weeds, vermin, and deadly microbes. The three of them wreaked havoc on Native Americans and their environment. Meanwhile Europeans took the most productive Indian food plants back to the Old World with them, sparking a population explosion in 17th and 18th century Europe. Part of that expanded European population, then, flowed back to the Western Hemisphere to replenish the decimated Native American population.

North America was not the only place such a scenario unfolded. And it wasn't the first.

## **God vs Allah**

Europe in 1400 was still slowly recovering from the Black Death and from unsuccessful Crusades. It was preoccupied with internal squabbles and endless wars. It had little interest in expanding its knowledge of science or developing new technologies. Its leading thinkers were convinced that the Greeks and Romans had already discovered pretty much everything that was possible or worthwhile for humans to discover, and the Bible had revealed everything else they needed to know. So any attempts to advance beyond that were heresy, and heretics were subject to church prosecution.

European Christians felt confined by their more successful neighbors, rivals, competitors – Muslims, dominated by the Ottoman Turks. Muslims controlled North Africa, the southern and eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Near East, Central and Southeast Asia. They controlled trade from Morocco to the East Indies, from Mongolia to Senegal. European consumers were forced to pay premium prices to Muslim traders for gold, ivory, silk, gems, and spices. Such commerce enriched

Muslims and drained Europeans' wealth. So did taxes collected by the Turkish sultan.

The Muslim monopoly on such commerce could be broken if Europeans could find a direct route to the sources of those commodities. Europeans were desperate to figure out a way to deal directly with the Orient, cutting out the Muslim middleman. Since Muslims embraced Islam, they were religious competitors as well. European Christians were feeling claustrophobic, boxed in by the Muslim empire, and they were eager to break out.

Their best hope for doing so lay on the Iberian Peninsula. Prior to 1469 that had been the home of the kingdoms of Aragon, Castile, and Portugal. In 1469 Prince Ferdinand and Queen Isabella tied the knot, uniting their bodies, souls, and countries (Aragon and Castile), giving birth to a brand spanking new baby country – Spain. In 1492 the happy couple reached out and snagged Granada, the last Muslim principality on the Iberian Peninsula.

Ferdinand and Isabella were just getting started in their campaign to extend the European Christian sphere of influence. Since Spain and Portugal were ideally located to venture forth into the Atlantic, those countries took the lead in maritime exploration and expansion. They welcomed Italian immigrants who were willing to support their expansionist cause. One of them was Christopher Columbus.

Fortunately, Spain and Portugal had developed a way as well as a will. They now had the ships, the geographic knowledge, the navigation skills, and the weapon (cannon) to travel around the globe (as they knew it) and to establish their dominance on faraway coasts. (This new capability had not come about with the intent to explore the distant Atlantic, but had been motivated to stimulate and facilitate expanded trade with northern Europe via the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.) They had already had some success exploring the northwestern coast of Africa. Those successes fueled greater interest, determination, and courage. Since Muslims had the eastern Mediterranean blocked, the Atlantic was the only way to go.

So, go they did. While exploring Africa's northwest coast, Iberian and Italian mariners discovered the

Canaries, Azores, and Madeiras – three sets of islands in the eastern Atlantic. With that, they hit the jackpot right away. The fishing was great. Trees were the source for valuable dyes. The islands also served as safe havens for Iberian vessels, and bases from which to extend their exploration missions.

From those island bases, Portugal took the lead in exploration along the African coast. At first they relied on hit-and-run raids, but as they encountered stiff African resistance, the Portuguese realized they needed to form alliances with local African rulers to get at the inland gold, ivory, pepper, and slaves. After 1450, the Portuguese negotiated commercial treaties, which allowed them to build a few fortified trading posts along the coast. Their primary purpose was to keep away rival European vessels. When they came along, the Portuguese threw the crews overboard and took possession of their vessels and contents.

Meanwhile, thousands of Europeans and their slaves flocked to two of the new islands. The Canaries were already a touch crowded with a people known as the *Guanche*. There were about 30 thousand of them in 1400. Their ancestors had apparently arrived there from North Africa some 3400 years earlier. The seven major Canary Islands were each headed by a rival chieftain, and they were each further internally divided politically. They had goats, pigs, and sheep. They grew wheat, beans, and peas. They had no cattle or horses, and they had only stone tools and weapons.

When the Guanache did not welcome the Iberians with open arms, the Iberians welcomed the Guanache into slavery. Of course, it was for their own good, because any people who rejected Christianity were justly enslaved for the sake of their own souls. Well, that and the economic benefit to the Iberians, of course, which was also justified by the fact that the Guanache were like animals. The Iberians were not bad people, they were simply performing their duty to spread Christianity, and if the Guanache had to be held in bondage to accept their proper and necessary Christian indoctrination, that was surely a small price to pay for their possible eternal salvation. Some of the natives saw the light and converted to Christianity, hoping to live

peacefully with the Iberians. But they were enslaved, anyway.

Around 1450, the Spanish took full control of the Canary Islands, pushing out the Portuguese. Guanche guerillas continued fighting until around the time Columbus made an appearance there on his way to the New World. It wasn't just superior weapons and fighting skills that allowed the Spanish to subdue the natives. It was European diseases, killing Guanche by the thousands, and crushing their will to resist their Iberian invaders. The Spanish were deeply sorry to have caused the death of so many potential slaves. By the middle of the 16th century the Guanche were nearly extinct, and the few survivors disappeared through assimilation and intermarriage.

While the Guanche were busy being slaves or victims of European diseases, Europeans continued to settle on the Azores and Madeiras. They cleared the fields for agriculture, especially wheat and grapes, and for grazing by animals imported from Europe. Although merchants and landowners made a nice profit exporting their excess produce to Europe, the islands suffered ecologically. By 1500, trees were scarce, which led to erosion and drought.

The Azores were too cool for growing sugar, but the very popular commodity grew well on the other islands. So well, in fact, that they became Europe's main source of sugar by 1500. Raising sugar was best done on plantations, and, as we know, plantations require lots of laborers. The need for slaves had been satisfied at first by the Guanche, but when they so rudely and prematurely succumbed to European diseases, Europeans turned to Africa for their labor supply. Africans had already long been harvesting war prisoners and criminals as slave inventory, but their business really boomed when the Portuguese established their maritime presence and influence along the African west coast. By 1500, Portuguese were buying about 1800 African slaves each year, primarily to work on the Canary and Madeira Islands.

These islands were the training grounds for European imperialism. They prepared the Europeans for the discovery, invasion, and

transformation of the Americas. They increased the European appetite for more discoveries and emboldened them to take greater risks in order to find and exploit new islands. In 1492, Columbus expected to find new islands on his way to the Orient, and he found them. But he had not expected them to be close to two continents with millions of inhabitants.

## Christopherens

Having colonized the Azores and Madeiras, the Portuguese focused their attention on exploring Africa and trying to find an eastward route to Asia. That made more sense than wandering far out into the Atlantic, because their African exploits were profitable and relatively risk-free. In 1494 the Spanish and the Portuguese, with help from the pope, signed the *Treaty of Tordisellas*, which established an imaginary vertical line through the Atlantic west of the Azores. Exploration east of the boundary was the domain of the Portuguese, and to the west the Spanish were in control.

No one had bothered discussing the matter with any other western European kingdoms, so they refused to recognize the treaty. As far as they were concerned, the pope had no right to exclude them from the fun. And the Iberians certainly were not the least bit interested in discussing the treaty with the Indians, either. The pope considered them pagans, savages, with no international legal rights.

As it turned out later, Brazil projected into Portuguese territory, but otherwise the Atlantic was wide open for Spanish exploration. Enter Christopher Columbus. What drove him was the desire to convert Asians to Christianity and recruit them to assist in a final crusade against Islam.

What prevented most Europeans from sailing west in search of Asia was not the belief that the earth was flat and the fear that they would fall off the face of the earth. It was their knowledge that the earth was just too darn big. Ancient Greeks had estimated the earth's circumference to be 24,000 miles. That put Asia some 10,000 to 12,000 miles west of Europe. Their ships could not carry enough water and food and other supplies to sustain them for such a long voyage. It was possible, of course,



to encounter islands along the way where they could resupply, but they couldn't count on that.

But that didn't worry Christopher Columbus. Did he know something the others didn't know? Yes. He knew that the earth is only about 18,000 miles around, and that Japan is only some 3,500 miles west of Europe. The bad news for Columbus was that his calculations were very wrong. The Ancient Greeks had been pretty accurate, and Columbus, who is today mistakenly considered a geographical genius, was all wet. The good news for Columbus was that the Americas turned up where Japan was supposed to be.

Columbus first landed at the Bahama Islands, then turned south to the West Indies. He thought they were the East Indies. He treated the Caribbean Islands and their Taino inhabitants just as the Iberians had handled the Azores, Madeiras, and Canaries. He planned to establish plantations with forced labor, which was fully justified by superior Hispanic culture, and compelled by the Christian religion. The natives would benefit immensely from both, even though they would not understand or enjoy it. As Columbus explained it:

**They do not have arms and they are all naked, and of no skill in arms, and so very cowardly that a thousand would not stand against three [armed Spaniards]. And so they are fit to be ordered about and made to work, plant, and do everything else that may be needed, and build towns and be taught our customs, and to go about clothed.**

Columbus, by virtue of the authority vested in him by his supreme imperial Christian arrogance, declared all the natives to be subjects of the Spanish crown. He emphasized the fact that not one native had objected or protested his declaration. It didn't seem to matter that not one native even understood his declaration.

He renamed all the islands after Spanish royalty and Christian holidays. He renamed himself *Christopherens*, meaning *Christ-bearer*.

The largest ship ran aground. The timber was used by 39 crew members tasked with building a fort and establishing a colony on the island of Hispaniola. Christopherens rounded up some natives, enslaved

them, and they along with the rest of the Europeans sailed the remaining two vessels back to Spain, arriving in March 1493.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella considered Columbus a hero, and they soon sent him right back to the New World, only this time it was a larger expedition. Their hero was declared admiral of the expedition, governor of the new islands, and a partner in the new venture, with a 10% share of all profits. Devout Catholics, the King and Queen were enthusiastic about converting those natives to Christianity.

In 1493 Columbus, with 17 ships, 1,200 men (no women), sugarcane plants, and livestock arrived back at Hispaniola. The plan was for this new colony to be self-sustaining. It would serve as a base for further exploration. Hides, gold, sugar, and slaves would be shipped back to Spain. Even with a language barrier, it was obvious to the Indians that the Europeans were there to stay, and to assume full control over them and their islands.

As though Columbus needed a further excuse, the deaths of the 39 crew members (left behind the year before) served as the pretext for waging a war of conquest. In 1495 he shipped 550 natives to Spain to be sold in the slave market. But most died during the voyage or within a year of exposure to European diseases. So, that idea was abandoned, and natives served instead as sex slaves or plantation workers. Not all natives were enslaved, but even the "free" Indians were required to turn over to the Europeans a quota of gold, based on the number of natives over the age of 14.

In 1500, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella mysteriously developed a conscience. They declared that the Taino were free, and were no longer to be enslaved. But there was little change on Hispaniola, because the declaration did not apply to natives captured in a *just* war. To colonials, even the slightest resistance by natives qualified as a just war, and if there was no resistance, colonials would make something up.

Columbus was domineering, overbearing, hot-tempered, antagonistic, and arrogant. He was also Italian, which did nothing to endear the brash upstart from Genoa to the Spanish colonials. The tyrannical Italian tried to place restrictions on the

pursuit of wealth by the colonials, but they realized it was simply to help increase his own wealth. There were violent mutinies, prompting violent reprisals. In 1500, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella had had enough, and they revoked Columbus' credentials, making Hispaniola a crown colony governed by a royal appointee, rather than Columbus' fiefdom. He continued his maritime explorations for Spain, with voyages in 1498 and 1502, reaching long stretches of South and Central American coast. Some scholars believe he remained convinced to his death in 1506 that he was close to the coast of Asia.

## After Columbus

Other explorers expanded on Columbus' work. John Cabot, another Italian, was hired by England in 1497 to find a northern route to Asia. He encountered the same shores the Norse had discovered earlier, but he was unaware of the history of Vinland. So he called his discovery Newfoundland. In 1500, Pedro Alvares Cabral discovered the coast of Brazil for Portugal. The following year, another Italian mariner demonstrated that South America was in fact a new continent. The Spanish continued to call it Las Indias (the Indies), but English mapmakers drew inspiration from the Italian who proved that it was not the Indies, Amerigo Vespucci.

Columbus failed to find a western route to Asia. But he succeeded in finding riches that would allow European Christendom to leave the Muslim world in the dust. During the next three centuries, American wealth fueled development and expansion of European commerce, technology, military power, and scientific knowledge.

Europeans continued to colonize the island of Hispaniola. In 1508, 45 Spanish vessels arrived in the Caribbean islands from Spain. As they had done in the Canary Islands, the European invaders transformed Hispaniola, introducing new crops, animals, and diseases. Many of the European newcomers died during the voyage or arrived too weak, hungry, and sick to work. Up to two-thirds of the colonials died within the first decade, 1493 – 1504.

Echoing the history of the Guanche on the Canary Islands, the Taino on Hispaniola were wiped out. From at least 300,000 in 1492, there were only 500 by 1548. Most were victims of European diseases, but callous, ruthless exploitation also played a significant role in the Taino extermination. They were forced to labor at mines, ranches, and plantations, suffering under a brutal work regimen, and subject to destructive raids by colonial soldiers if demands were resisted. Thousands fled to densely forested hills, where they were especially vulnerable to disease and starvation. According to 16th century Spanish historian Las Casas, the deadly 1518 smallpox epidemic was God's merciful way of delivering the Taino from their European torment. As in the Canaries, Hispaniola Europeans did not intend to kill the natives. They much preferred them alive, to serve as slaves and pay tribute. (Well, not always. Later, English colonists were known to cheer epidemics and native depopulation in areas the colonists wanted for their own.)

The fate of the Canary Guanche and the Hispaniola Taino was not unique. It didn't usually happen so quickly, but a similar scenario played out whenever and wherever European colonizers arrived on the scene. From the Caribbean islands, the Europeans spread their diseases to Central America, Mexico, and Peru between 1510 and 1535. In mid-16th century, it was the turn of the American southwest and southeast. In the early 1600s, epidemics hit the natives of New England and eastern Canada. Native fatalities peaked in the Pacific northwest in the late 18th century. In 1837, smallpox reduced the Mandan population of (now) North Dakota from 2000 to 40.

Even mild European childhood ailments like chickenpox were lethal to Native Americans. And even if one disease wasn't fatal, it often left the person weak, so that when subjected to a second disease, death was certain. Nearly everyone in a village got sick at the same time, leaving no one to care for the sick, gather firewood and keep the fire burning, or get food and water. So, many natives died of dehydration, starvation, or exposure. The few survivors were demoralized.

The first wave of an epidemic always afflicted almost every Indian, and within a decade, about

half of them were dead. The epidemics were so frequent and diverse that the native populations were unable to recover by reproduction. In 50 years, the populations were down to around 10% of their original numbers. Some groups had so few survivors that they disappeared into a neighboring group. The tribes we are familiar with from our studies of colonial American history are a subset of the Indian nations that existed before European colonization. Most scholars now believe that in 1492 there were about 50 million Indians in North and South America, around 5 million of those living north of Mexico.

Those epidemics didn't have much of an impact on the European colonizers. They had already built up immunities. The one disease that did follow Europeans back to the Old World was venereal syphilis. It was painful, but not terribly lethal, and after 1600 it had lost much of its virulence. Europeans suffered far more from diseases they encountered while trying to colonize sub-Saharan African countries. Malaria and yellow fever were transferred to the New World by infected African slaves, which added to the mix of epidemics that devastated North America.

It is interesting that things worked out very differently in Africa than they did in North America. In spite of inferior weapons, Africans were able to hold their own against European invaders by virtue of their large population. And Africans were not nearly as vulnerable to European diseases. The shoe was on the other European foot in Africa, where the newcomers suffered an extraordinarily high death rate from African tropical diseases until the 19th century development of quinine. European soldiers conquered most of Africa, but there were few European colonists, and even that minimal colonial rule was short-lived, because Africans reclaimed power in the 20th century.

Among the consequences of dramatic North American native depopulation was the availability of much more land for European settlers. In 1620, New England colonists had their pick of abandoned Indian villages, with fertile land already conveniently cleared. But another consequence was that there were fewer people to work that fertile, cleared, available land. Colonists had originally expected to live off the labor of the

enslaved natives, but epidemics had spoiled their plans, and left them with the urgent need to find replacements. The population of Europe had exploded from 80 million in 1492 to 105 million in 1650 and 180 million in 1800. Many of them did move to the New World, but they did not go there to perform hard labor.

The story of Ireland is one that was common in Europe. New crops from the Americas were transferred back to the Old World, contributing to a population surge in Ireland. When the growth caught up to the food supply, hungry Irish citizens headed across the Atlantic to North America, where they found an abundance of land where Indians had recently lived.

In other words, the post-1492 interaction between the Old and New Worlds was great for Europe and disastrous for North America. New World plants led to an increased Old World food supply, which led to an Old World population explosion. Old World diseases decimated the New World native population, and made extensive, fertile new lands available to Europeans. So the surplus population from the Old World flowed westward to fill the New World population vacuum. With the Europeans went rats, weeds, and pathogens which devastated the North American ecology.

## Chapter 2: New Spain

### Overview

During the 16th century, Spain established a vast empire in the Caribbean area, and in North and South America. There were seven million Spaniards in Europe. But the Spanish controlled 20 million Native Americans in the New World. The New Spain exceeded even the Roman Empire in area, population, and cultural diversity.

This success alarmed the other major European powers. But instead of rushing to establish their own colonies in the New World, Spain's rivals opted to steal from the Spanish. They would let Spain do all the hard work, then they would simply help themselves to the fruits of Spain's labor. Plunder was more practical than competition. But, of course, they had to find some noble-sounding rationalization for their actions, so they invented the

Black Legend. The story was that the Spanish were much more brutal, savage, barbaric, and destructive than other Europeans, so they deserved to be victimized by their morally superior rivals. In fact, the Spanish were probably no worse than the others. They just got a head start at exploiting the New World, so they had more opportunities to do exactly what the other European powers would likely have done, and often did do when they got the chance.

## Conquests

At the beginning of the 16th century, diseases had decimated the native populations of Cuba and Hispaniola. That left the Spanish conquerors in desperate need of slave labor to work the mines, ranches, and sugar plantations. So, entrepreneurial Spaniards turned westward in search of replacements for the Taino. They started with Central America, but those slaves suffered the same fate as the Taino had, forcing the slave traders to expand their search for victims from Venezuela to (now) South Carolina.

In doing so, the Spanish heard about the wealthy Aztecs of Mexico. They learned that the Aztecs relied on a steady supply of tribute from their surrounding subjugated peoples, who also provided victims for Aztec sacrifices. The Spanish, attracted to Aztec wealth and appalled by Aztec pagan sacrifices, decided to conquer the Aztecs. An impatient Hernan Cortes led 600 well-armed Cuban volunteers on an unauthorized mission. But his most effective weapon was shrewd diplomacy. He convinced the tributaries to support him in exchange for liberation from the Aztecs. The logic of that, plus the impressive new weapons brought by Cortes, won many of them over.

Those Spanish weapons also, obviously, alarmed the Aztec leader, Moctezuma, who invited Cortes into his city, Tenochtitlan. The plan was to buy Cortes off, or maybe frighten him off with a display of supernatural powers, but that didn't work out well. The Spanish were impressed with the city of Tenochtitlan and with Moctezuma's palace. Spain's largest city was Seville, with a population of 70,000. Tenochtitlan was cleaner, more orderly, and much larger – a population of 200,000.

Cortes held Moctezuma hostage and tried to take the city by force. The Spanish did not succeed with bloody street fighting, and they were temporarily thrown out of the city. But they soon returned with both Spanish and Native American reinforcements, laid siege to Tenochtitlan, and after four months destroyed the city. The European conquerors threw Aztec priests to the war dogs (to be torn apart), tortured Aztec nobles (to find out where their gold was hidden), and enslaved thousands of captives (to work on constructing Mexico City, including a Christian cathedral and a suitable residence for Cortes, using raw material from the Aztec pyramids and Moctezuma's palace).

It was no longer important that Cortes' mission had not been authorized. His success made it legitimate, just as Cortes had planned. He was appointed governor of Mexico, given a title of nobility, and became Spain's wealthiest citizen.

During the 1530s Francisco Pizarro quickly conquered the Inca empire in Peru, and during the 1540s the Spanish gradually subdued the Mayans of Central America. Superior European weapons and animals (horses and war dogs) helped the Spanish overcome much larger Native American forces. But they also, as they had done in Tenochtitlan, found allies among subordinated locals who resented their oppressors. And, as always, the Spanish had unintentional allies in the form of diseases, which killed Native Americans by the thousands. The weakened and demoralized survivors offered no effective resistance. From the Spanish perspective, these epidemics proved that God was on their side. From the Native American perspective, their gods had deserted them.

## Conquistadors

Spain didn't have a lot of men or money to invest in conquering and colonizing the Americas, so they developed a method known as the *adentalado* system. Private, independent military contractors would obtain a license from the crown, entitling the crown to one-fifth of the plunder, and sovereignty over any conquered lands. The military commander holding the license, the *adentalado*, was responsible for recruiting his own men and finding his own investors, who also would share in the plunder. Rank-and-file soldiers were not paid, and

they had to provide their own weapons and provisions. So they, too, had to find investors, who would share in the plunder. They were willing to do all that in hopes of a successful mission, providing enough booty and profits from the slave trade to pay off all their debts and have enough left over to make it worth their while. They were then free to go their own way or join another mission.

Spanish gentry, however, like Cortes, in addition to booty and slave-trade profits, would reap even greater riches by demanding tribute from conquered Native Americans living in surrounding villages (*pueblos*). These *encomenderos* (feudal lords) were expected to provide the pueblos with protection from other Indians, build a church, and support a priest to promote Christianity.

Only superior officers could become *encomenderos*, so rank-and-file soldiers were highly motivated to keep joining new missions in hopes of some day becoming an *encomendero* themselves. So, it was greed that expanded the reach of conquistadors into northern Mexico and up to the Rio Grande. But, in the mind of the conquistador (Spanish soldier, explorer, adventurer) it wasn't really greed that drove them; it was the more noble cause of expanding Christianity. With God on their side, it was only fair that pagans suffer whatever fate befell them. And it was just and proper that the Spanish who (out of the goodness of their hearts) brought Christianity to those pagans be rewarded with plunder, profits, and tribute.

Conquistadors conducted themselves in compliance with Spanish law, which demanded that Native Americans be given a clear choice. The conquistador read a statement (*requerimiento*) to the natives, explaining that they were to immediately accept Spanish rule and conversion to Christianity. Failure to accept that generous offer meant that the natives would face a just war, with all the harsh punishment, destruction, and death which that entailed. And the Spanish would be absolved of all guilt and blame in the matter. It was all conducted with the requisite witnesses and notarized statement. Of course, the Native Americans had no idea what was going on, because they didn't understand a word of Spanish. But conquistadors couldn't get all bogged down in

pesky little details like that. Only the priests seemed to notice or be concerned with the absurdity.

There was another driving force behind conquistadors' missions, in addition to greed and Christianity. There was a strict hierarchy of power in European societies, which meant that everyone (almost everyone) was forced to submit to a superior. Spanish conquistadors dreamed of escaping their dependence on a superior, and they saw their power over Native Americans as a way to make that dream come true.

But that idea didn't sit well with the Spanish crown, who feared that the *encomenderos* planned to give the sovereign only token allegiance once they had established their powerful little fiefdoms in the New World. The crown also felt that the conquistadors were killing and enslaving too many Native Americans, instead of converting them to Christianity and allowing them to become good taxpaying citizens.

Missionary friars also had a bone to pick with the conquistadors. Priests preferred friendly persuasion to force and violence. The idea had originated in Hispaniola in 1511 by a friar who asked: **Are these Indians not men? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not obliged to love them as you love yourselves?** Such crazy talk outraged his congregation, but it convinced one *encomendero*, Bartolome de Las Casas, who joined the Dominicans and became an eloquent critic of American conquest. But even the kinder, gentler approach of the friars was no picnic for Native Americans. Converts were forced to completely abandon their own culture and practices, fully embrace the unfamiliar beliefs and customs of their conquerors, build new churches, and wholeheartedly adopt the Catholic faith. Many pretended to do so, but secretly lived in denial, clinging to the illusion that their nightmare would end soon. They had survived other conquerors, and they would outlast the Spanish, as well.

Friars eventually realized that, although they might be able to control Indians' actions, they could not control their thoughts, and the best they could hope for was a compromise. Indians were able to preserve much of their culture, and their religious

practices evolved into a hybrid of Catholicism and traditional Indian customs.

During the 1530s, the leading conquistadors were forced (by the crown) into retirement, or they died fighting other conquistadors over the spoils of conquest. Administration of the colonies passed to bureaucrats, clerics, and lawyers, but former conquistadors still retained their *encomienda* rights, and they remained as wealthy, influential members of the colonial elite.

During that time the crown also enacted reform measures designed to protect Native Americans from the worst *encomendero* treatment. But they were not very effective, for two reasons. First, colonial officials did not want to incur the wrath of former *encomenderos*. Second, the officials understood that money trumped humanitarianism, and reforms were not intended to interfere with the flow of wealth from the colonies to the crown. That meant keeping the natives enslaved and working.

Native American slaves were kept in unsanitary camps, increasing their exposure to infectious diseases. Indians who remained in their villages went hungry, because animals ate their crops. Because there were more animals than the land could support, erosion was widespread. The native population declined from their pre-colonial level of ten million to one million by 1620. The *encomienda* system gave way to *haciendas* (large rural estates) as Spanish enterprises gained ownership of land in Mexico, but for the surviving Native Americans there was little change.

## Colonies

Around 250,000 Spanish emigrated to the New World during the 1500s. They were motivated by twin prospects of poverty if they stayed in Spain and opportunity if they went to New Spain. Most of them were young single men, because women were deterred by the hardships and dangers of emigration. As a result, the young male emigrants took Indian wives and concubines, with mixed offspring called *mestizos*. By the start of the 18th century, *mestizos* outnumbered Native Americans.

Along the Caribbean coast, Indians were replaced by imported African slaves. Their offspring sired by Hispanic masters were known as *mulattoes*. It was

no longer a simple matter of Spaniard and Indian, Christian and pagan. Colonial authorities developed a complex new racial hierarchy (the *castas*), with pure African and Indian at the bottom, pure Spaniard at the top, and multiple gradations of mixture in between. The higher *castas* enjoyed greater legal privileges.

After 1525, most Spanish capital and emigrants ended up in Mexico and Peru, which eclipsed the older Caribbean colonies in size, natural resources, and Indian populations. Mexico and Peru became the great cultural centers of the Spanish Empire.

The Spanish American empire was divided into two huge administrative regions (*viceroalties*), each controlled by a crown-appointed viceroy. In the mid-16th century, the New Spain viceroyalty consisted of Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean islands. The viceroyalty of Peru consisted of all of South America except for Portuguese Brazil. Each viceroyalty had an archbishop to supervise the clergy, convents, and churches. Each viceroyalty also had a council (*audencia*), combining the functions of a legislature, an executive cabinet, and a supreme court. This system was designed to prevent the viceroys from assuming too much power. It was a kind of checks-and-balances system, with all three branches being subjected to periodic thorough investigations and audits.

The branches were staffed with proud and ambitious aristocrats, jealous of their powers, privileges, and jurisdictions. Competition, rivalry, and power struggles prevented administrative efficiency, with each branch eager to report (or invent, if necessary) misconduct by the other branches, in an effort to curry favor with the crown. All important (and many minor) decisions were made in Spain, and word of Spain's decisions and instructions took at least a year to make their way through the Old World bureaucracy and back across the Atlantic. This inefficient system may have achieved its goal of limiting the power of the viceroys, but the crown was never able to achieve its desired level of control over the colonies.

## Gold and Silver, Blessing and Curse

About 181 tons of gold and 16,000 tons of silver were shipped from America to Europe between



1500 and 1650. By 1585, bullion from America amounted to about 25% of the crown's total revenue. It reversed Spain's balance-of-trade deficit with Asia, and allowed Spain to buy much more from the Far East. But it also caused massive inflation, which hurt workers, who saw the price of goods rise much faster than their wages.

The inflated prices of Spain's manufactured goods resulted in increased purchases of cheaper goods imported from other parts of Europe, and it made Spanish manufacturers less competitive in the export markets. Investment in Spanish manufacturing was less attractive, causing a decline in technological innovation as well as product quality. Indian and Hispanic consumers in the Americas also bought more products from Dutch, English, and French traders, instead of from Spain.

The abundance of gold and silver encouraged the crown to adopt a more aggressive foreign policy, pursuing military intervention in North Africa, Italy, and the Netherlands. The drain of foreign wars would lead to a sharp decline in Spain's military and economy during the 17th century.

## Alarm Bells in Europe

Spain's King Philip II (1556-1598), a devout and rigid Catholic, considered Protestantism as heresy, and he was determined to destroy it. That placed Italians on the same par as Native Americans, to be subjugated by Spain. Having conquered Native Americans so easily, Philip became overconfident and treated European opponents with contempt. Europeans were alarmed by this arrogant and belligerent attitude, especially in light of the stories they had heard of Spanish atrocities in the New World.

Alarm grew when Spain and Portugal united to form an even bigger, wealthier, more powerful Spanish Empire. Spain now incorporated Portugal's far-flung, wealthy colonies, including the Azores and Madeiras in the Atlantic, Brazil in South America, and trading posts along the coasts of Africa, India, and the East Indies. It seemed that other Europeans were about to be totally dominated by Spain.

The most practical way of starting to correct the imbalance of power seemed to be to steal Spain's wealth on the high seas. The Dutch, French, and English all lacked substantial navies, so they turned to private investors. In 1523 much of the gold stolen by Cortes from the Aztecs was then stolen by French pirates from Spanish ships. The Spanish responded by building bigger, better-armed ships, and by travelling the high seas in convoys. But the extra expense and longer intervals between shipments placed Spanish merchants at a disadvantage.

Meanwhile, smugglers (often the pirates themselves) cut into Spain's market monopoly in the Americas. They paid no Spanish taxes, and they didn't have the expenses of Spain's convoy system, so they were able to offer better prices to Hispanic customers in the New World.

During the 1580s and 1590s the English took the lead in pirating. They also provided aid for the Protestant rebels in the Netherlands, both of which infuriated King Philip II, who responded by sending an armada of warships to seize control of the English Channel and pave the way for an invasion of England by Spanish troops stationed in the Netherlands. The faster and more mobile English warships, with longer-range cannons, broke up the armada, which was further battered by storms during their retreat.

Spanish prestige was wounded, and English confidence was bolstered. England stepped up her pirating activities. Spain built immense stone fortifications at major seaports in the Americas. It was somewhat effective against pirates, but it also diverted a great deal of American bullion from Spain. Less than a third of the 1590s level of bullion was now reaching the crown, creating a financial crisis.

The French, Dutch, and English eventually realized that pirating was only a temporary solution. To assure a regular and reliable flow of wealth, they needed to establish their own colonies, and build their own American empires. One way to do that was by seizing colonies from Spain. But that was dangerous and expensive. A safer, although slower, approach was to find coastal areas on the North American continent that had not been settled

by the Spanish. So, they sent mariners to probe the unguarded Atlantic seaboard, searching out bases for both pirates and plantations.

This probing activity, in turn, alarmed the Spanish. They suddenly were eager to explore the vast area north of the Gulf of Mexico. The race for North American colonial settlement was on. But Spain was the tortoise, not the hare. The elements of a successful Spanish colony in central Mexico and Peru were not easy to come by farther north. There, the Native Americans were typically widely dispersed, mobile, less prosperous, and therefore more resistant to Spanish aggression. They often did not practice horticulture, which meant no fields of maize. And there was no gold. Instead of being able to live as parasites off the native land and labor, the Spanish found themselves victimized by nomadic Indians who raided mining camps, ranches, and mule trains for animals, provisions, and weapons. On one hand, colonization north of the Gulf of Mexico hardly seemed worth the effort. On the other hand, the Spanish never completely abandoned hope that riches lay just out of sight. All they had to do was keep looking, and they would find it. After all, it had worked for Cortes. He didn't find his wealth immediately on the coastal areas, but only after he pushed westward.

## **Cabeza de Vaca**

A funny thing happened to one conquistador on his way to wealth. In 1528 he was second in command over an expedition of 300 conquistadors. From Tampa Bay (Florida), they ventured into the Florida peninsula, where they were attacked by Apalachee Indians. They built five barges and escaped the Apalachee by coasting in the Gulf of Mexico. The barges broke apart off the coast of Texas, drowning most of the conquistadors, including their leader, Narvaez. Most of the survivors soon died of exposure, malnutrition, and disease. The rest, with no horses or weapons, became slaves of the Karankawa Indians.

The last four survivors included Cabeza de Vaca and a black Moorish slave, Esteban. The Native Americans logically assumed that since the Spaniards had brought their diseases with them, they also brought the cures. So, they insisted that these four survivors assume the role of healers.

The conquistadors, however, had no idea how to cure anything, so all they could do was play along and hope for the best.

**The way in which we cured was by making the sign of the cross over them and blowing on them and reciting a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria; and then we prayed as best we could to God Our Lord to give them health and inspire them to give us good treatment.**

It worked! Most of the patients survived, and the four became local heroes. In exchange for food and gifts, one tribe would pass the healers on to the next tribe. The healing conquistadors made their way across southern Texas, into New Mexico, and then into northwestern Mexico. There they encountered villages under attack by slave-raiding conquistadors. There Vaca came face to face with the evil of what he had once been.

He had been forced to learn Indian ways in order to survive. He came to understand and appreciate the complexities of Indian culture. Now he would have to make another major adjustment, this time back into his native culture. He was no longer a conquistador, but he was still committed to the Christian faith and Hispanic culture. He lobbied the crown for an Indian policy of pacification. Good treatment was the only way to win Indian hearts and minds to Christianity, he insisted. Spanish policy did begin to shift, although slowly and incompletely, toward Vaca's approach, but military might remained the main means of expansion.

Vaca did not encounter significant quantities of precious metals during his journeys, but he had heard rumors of riches farther north. That was enough to excite the imaginations of conquistadors, and it inspired two great missions during 1539-1543. Hernando de Soto led one mission through Florida and (now) the American southeast. Francisco Vasquez de Coronado led the other mission from Mexico across the American southwest and into the Great Plains. Both mostly ignored the new Spanish policy of restraint, and both were failures. Further expeditions to the north were limited.



## Hernando de Soto

Beginning in the spring of 1539, Soto led 600 men across (now) Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and east Texas. Native Americans in the carefully cultivated, densely populated heartland of the Mississippi culture alternated between resistance and cooperation in the hope that one or the other would expedite the departure of Soto and his men. Feeding the Spanish invaders was extremely taxing for the Mississippians.

Soto seized local chiefs and held them hostage, demanding ransom in the form of food, women, porters, and guides. The slightest resistance triggered harsh reprisals. Some natives had their nose or a hand cut off, for example. They were the lucky ones. Others were thrown to the war dogs or burned alive. Villages and graves were pillaged. Informants were tortured. When the conquistadors did not find gold, they felt betrayed and frustrated. They left behind corpses, mutilated survivors, ravaged fields, empty storehouses, burned towns, and diseases. Indian traders, travelers, and refugees carried the diseases to areas that had not encountered Soto directly. Diseases disseminated quickly in settlements and towns, making them deathtraps.

Mississippian population dwindled, and its culture collapsed. Most natives abandoned their towns to escape disease and the troubled spirits of its victims. As they dispersed, the power of their chiefs diminished, in part because the agricultural base was no longer sufficient to produce the necessary tribute to support them. But it was also in part because survivors had lost faith in the chiefs who had failed to protect them from waves of death and devastation.

Power shifted to the poorer and weaker natives who had established residence in the less fertile hills. Their small, scattered villages had not been as susceptible to European invasion and disease. They took in the valley refugees, while the abandoned towns were reclaimed by forests and wildlife, including bison. Chiefdoms gave way to new loose confederations of smaller villages with no pyramids or graves containing human sacrifices. The new chiefs were less powerful, with the

exception of the Natchez people along the lower Mississippi River. It was a process of *ethnogenesis* (the emergence of new ethnic groups through the consolidation of diverse peoples). So, most Native American tribes in that area after 1700 were relatively new composite groups, not direct descendants of the original natives.

## Francisco Vasquez de Coronado

In 1538 the New Spain viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, dispatched a small scouting party led by Franciscan friar Fray Marcos de Niza, guided by Esteban (the black member of Vaca's party). Esteban was granted entry into a Zuni village in (now) western New Mexico. He was soon killed for abusing the women, prompting Fray Marcos to immediately return to Mexico. Instead of giving an honest report, he let his imagination run wild, claiming he had seen a city (Cibola) even richer and larger than Tenochtitlan. Based on that fantasy, Mendoza authorized a larger expedition, led by Coronado, who organized and equipped a force of 300 Hispanic soldiers, six Franciscan priests, 800 Mexican Indians for support services, and 1500 horses and pack animals.

Led by Fray Marcos, the conquistadors reached the Zuni city of Hawikuh in July 1540. When they were denied entrance, Coronado's men killed most of the town's inhabitants and expelled the rest. They expected to find gold, since Fray Marcos had assured them that this was Cibola. But Hawikuh was simply a modest pueblo, with plenty of food, but not the riches Fray Marcos had promised. The friar was not a popular man. Coronado was determined to at least recover his considerable investment, and he was eager to believe the ubiquitous stories about riches just over the horizon.

Advancing into (now) New Mexico, the conquistadors encountered natives with significant ceremonial differences and at least seven different languages. They didn't consider themselves part of a common people, but to Coronado, they were all pretty much alike, and he referred to all of them as *Pueblo*. Even those who spoke the same language typically had dramatic, often violent, political differences. But they began to unite against a common enemy, as the conquistadors, during the

winter of 1540-1541, plundered their food and raped their women. When the Pueblo rebelled, the conquistadors destroyed 13 of their 60 villages, killed hundreds of natives, and burned 100 of them at the stake. The cunning Pueblo told fictional accounts of a wealthy kingdom called Quivira to the north and east, across a great grassy plain.

The ruse worked, but only temporarily. Coronado's men set out across the Great Plains, finally reaching Quivira, which turned out to be nothing more than a modest village of Wichita Indians, with no gold. The Pueblo guide was tortured, and he confessed the plot before he was killed. The conquistadors managed to find their way back to Hawikuh, where they were once again (in the winter of 1541-1542) the unwelcomed guests of the Pueblo.

Coronado returned to northern Mexico in April 1542, leaving behind a Franciscan priest and four assistants, who were quickly subjected to Pueblo revenge. Coronado, to add insult to injury, was prosecuted for abusing the Pueblo.

## Florida

After the expensive and disastrous missions of Soto and Coronado, the Spanish lost interest in northern explorations. But it was restored in the 1560s by French pirates, who focused much of their activity in the relatively narrow channel between Florida and the Bahamas. Half the revenue bound for Spain was being lost to French pirates and to Spanish shipwrecks along the Florida coast. Indians salvaged precious metals from the wreckage, and ironically, enslaved the Hispanic survivors.

The crown decided to build a fort along the Atlantic coast of Florida to discourage French pirates, recover sunken gold, and free the enslaved sailors. Leadership of the fort went to an adelantado, Pedro Menendez de Aviles, a ruthless naval officer. Their first task was to deal with a newly established French base (Fort Caroline) at the mouth of the St Johns River. The colonists there were Huguenots (Protestants), despised by Spanish Catholics. Menendez and 500 men surprised and killed most of the Huguenots at their fort on September 20, 1565. The remaining French surrendered a few

days later, hoping they would not be killed. They received no mercy, however. Menendez explained to King Philip II: **It seemed to me to chastise them in this way [hands tied, stabbed to death] would serve God our Lord, as well as Your Majesty, and that we should thus be left more free from this wicked sect.**

San Agustin (St Augustine) was established just 45 miles south of the former Fort Caroline. It was the first enduring European colonial town established within the territory of the future United States. Menendez built seven other posts along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts – to help discourage the French from returning, to intimidate the Indians, and to watch out for pirates.

In 1570, Menendez also established a Jesuit mission on the Chesapeake Bay. The priests turned down the company of soldiers offered by Menendez, fearing they would provoke the Indians. Their guide was a young native who had been captured by Spanish mariners in 1561, taken to Mexico, then sent to Spain, where he met the king. Baptized in Mexico as Luis de Velasco, the young man convinced Spanish officials to send him back home to convert his people to Christianity. Now back at Chesapeake Bay, with the Jesuits, however, he deserted the priests and warned his people to resist the Christian newcomers. In February 1571 the eight Jesuits were massacred, their chapel was destroyed, and one Spanish boy was taken captive. The following year, Menendez arrived to investigate. Velasco avoided capture, but 20 Indians were killed in battle, and another 14 were hanged before Menendez sailed away.

By the time Menendez died in 1574, San Agustin and Santa Elena were the only Florida settlements that had not succumbed to either French or Indian attack. Menendez had not found any silver mines, and he had grown weary of Spain's pacification policy. **It would greatly serve God Our Lord and your majesty if these [Indians] were dead, or given as slaves, he opined.**

Santa Elena didn't last much longer, either. In 1587, fearing English attack, its residents moved to San Agustin and destroyed the fort behind them, leaving San Agustin as the only Spanish settlement in Florida. But no one wanted to go there because

of the horror stories they'd heard about Florida. Since it generated no revenue, it was a financial drain on the Spanish crown, and the colonists struggled to stay alive.

Spanish authorities then tried a different approach. Instead of sending conquistadors into Florida, they sent Franciscan missionaries. During the 1590s and early 1600s, Franciscan friars established a number of missions along the Atlantic coast north of San Agustin into Georgia (Guale), in north central Florida (Timucua), and in the panhandle (Apalachee). The governor of San Agustin sent gifts to chiefs who welcomed the priests into their villages. The Spanish established trade which gave Indians access to knives, fishhooks, beads, hatchets, and blankets. Some chiefs got with the program in order to increase their own power relative to rival neighboring villages. Some natives reluctantly turned to the Christian newcomers because their own shamans had proved unable to protect them from new diseases.

In return, however, the Native Americans were forced to pay a heavy cultural price. Their cherished wooden idols were burned. Their traditional ball game was banned. Christian morality was strictly enforced, including monogamous marriage, and clothing that covered female breasts. Timucuans protested that Indian "vices" made them happy, and they must, therefore, be good. But it fell on deaf Christian ears. Defiance of the friars resulted in severe whippings, and the use of military force if necessary. A 1597 rebellion in Guale and a 1656 rebellion in Timucua were both brutally suppressed.

Missions were built beside major Indian villages, whose inhabitants supported themselves and the priests. Using local materials and labor, the friars constructed a church, a cookhouse, a missionary residence, and a barracks for a few soldiers. Each mission also had a Christian cemetery, which filled quickly with Indian victims of European diseases. This new system protected Indians from aggression, but not from epidemics. In 1659 10,000 Indians died of measles. But new missions continued to spring up. In 1675, 40 friars ministered to 20,000 native converts, who worshiped in 36 churches. The Franciscans' pacification approach was having some success in Florida.

## New Mexico

The pacification approach was not limited to Florida. Franciscans also returned to the Rio Grande, hoping to create converts for Christianity and taxpayers for the crown. The crown was also motivated by fear that rivals may attempt to establish a base there from which to launch an attack on Mexico. And some joined the mission hoping to find silver mines there.

The adelantado system was intact, but with a few minor revisions. For one thing, new missions were to be called *pacifications*, not *conquests*. And adelantados were ordered to take a peaceful and charitable approach in their mission. That put adelantados in a bit of a pickle. On the one hand, they went heavily into debt to finance their missions, and the only way they knew to satisfy their investors and make a profit was to conquer and enslave Indians. Conversion to Christianity was fine, but that didn't pay the bills. Producing good taxpaying citizens was great for the crown, but it did not provide the quick big score expected by creditors.

Don Juan de Onate was appointed the mission's adelantado by the viceroy. Like all other conquistadors, Onate did not suffer from low self-esteem. In the spring of 1598 he led 500 colonists, including 129 soldiers and seven Franciscan friars into the northern Rio Grande Valley to establish the new colony of New Mexico. That put them in the midst of the Pueblo peoples, who at first offered no resistance.

But that changed when the uninvited guests decided to take over a pueblo, rather than build their own settlement. Onate's colonists kicked the Pueblo out of their own pueblo, renamed it San Gabriel, and then they scattered throughout the neighboring pueblos demanding maize, deerskins, blankets, buffalo robes, firewood, and women.

The Pueblo were already suffering the negative consequences of Spanish cattle, who roamed freely, damaging crops. It was painful for Pueblo to fork over their maize to the Spaniards, because that meant members of their own families would go hungry. One brave Indian made the mistake of telling the white man just how he felt about the

situation. He suddenly found himself severely dead, after the governor threw him off the roof. During the winter months, Onate's colonists helped themselves to Indian blankets, leaving women naked and cold.

In December 1598, Captain Don Juan de Zaldivar (Onate's nephew) led a patrol to the pueblo of Acoma to help themselves to more provisions. Indian warriors killed Zaldivar and ten soldiers. The following month, Onate's soldiers paid a visit to Acoma, where they killed 800 Indians, including men, women, and children. They put 500 survivors on trial for treason and murder. In a not-so-shocking verdict, everyone over the age of 12 was found guilty and sentenced to 20 years of slavery. All males over the age of 25 also got one of their feet chopped off, just so they wouldn't be tempted to run away or give their masters a hard time. Children age 12 and under were declared innocent, and they were sent to Mexico to serve Christian families.

Bestowing such bountiful blessings of Christianity and Hispanic culture on Native Americans no doubt warmed the cockles of Onate's heart, but he was losing money. Silver was nowhere to be found, and that's what he really went there for. Never exactly a deep thinker, Onate became more desperate and irrational. He set out across the Great Plains in 1601, in search of gold at Quivira, just as Coronado had done. Then he turned west, searching for a route to the Pacific Ocean, making it as far as the Colorado River.

Rather than face facts and report his failures accurately to the viceroy, Onate repeated the chimerical tales Indians had been telling him. There were stories of untold riches not too far away. There was a tribe who lived on odors and never ate. There were men with verile members so long that they wound them four times around the waste, and in the act of copulation the man and woman were far apart. Indians laughed their pagan posteriors off at Onate's gullibility. But the viceroy was not amused, and reported to the king that this conquest is becoming a fairy tale. (Oops. I think he meant pacification, not conquest.)

Colonists turned on Onate, protesting that he had lured them to a harsh land with false promises.

Realizing that they could never prosper in New Mexico, most of the colonists had returned to Mexico by 1602. The Franciscan friars also turned on Onate. They accused the governor of adultery, and of alienating and ruining the Indians. They wanted to know, **If we who are Christians cause so much harm and violence, why should they become Christians?** Onate was removed, prosecuted, found guilty of adultery and abusing both Indians and colonists, stripped of his titles and offices, and ordered to stay out of New Mexico.

The viceroy was inclined to abandon New Mexico, but the friars persuaded him to not give up, because there were over 7,000 converted Pueblo there who, without priests and protection, would no doubt soon eschew all the "benefits and blessings" of Christianity. The viceroy certainly didn't want that on his conscience, so in 1609 he appointed Don Pedro de Peralta as the new governor, and he made up a bunch of new rules for New Mexico:

The main Spanish settlement would be moved away from the natives, in order to reduce tension and friction with Pueblo pueblos; colonists would raise their own crops, in order to reduce stealing from the natives; only married men would serve as soldiers in New Mexico, in order to reduce rapes; the garrison would be limited to 50 men, in order to reduce costs; there would be no new explorations, in order to reduce frustrating, expensive, embarrassing wild goose chases.

By 1628 there were 50 missions spread throughout the Rio Grande Valley and Pecos Valley. A year later there were new missions to the west, in Acoma, Zuni, and Hopi pueblos, and there were thousands of new converts to fill the churches. Not only were they Christians, complete with baptism, but they were expected to become Spaniards in the way they behaved, dressed, cooked, ate, and walked. Failure to live up to the Franciscans' high, strict standards resulted in severe punishment.

Why were the Pueblo peoples willing to subject themselves to such foreign and harsh treatment? Because they figured they should go along to get along. Better that than to incur the wrath of the soldiers or the harsh discipline of the priests. Because they hoped that those Spanish soldiers would protect them from nearby nomadic warrior

bands of Indians, like the Apache and Ute. Because they wanted the advantages Hispanic culture had to offer, such as new crops, metal tools, and domesticated animals (like sheep, goats, pigs, and mules). Because they wanted to adapt for themselves the supernatural powers of the priests.

While they envied the powers demonstrated by priests (through celibacy, endurance of pain and hardship, willingness to accept martyrdom if necessary), they weren't sure whether the priests were there to use their powers for good or for evil. In the case of diseases, for example, it became painfully clear that the Indians' traditional protections were totally inadequate, and that the priests were the only ones who knew the magic cures. On the other hand, it was these newcomers who had brought the diseases in the first place. And the priests weren't terribly successful at preventing widespread death from epidemics, either. In fact, some natives suspected the priests were practicing deadly forms of magic, including baptism.

So, the priests were always on probation. Gaining converts and building churches was certainly a measure of success, but an epidemic could quickly turn Pueblo public opinion against the Franciscans, who would likely be afforded an opportunity to prove their acceptance of martyrdom. The number of missions, churches, and converts was also misleading in terms of Indian acceptance of Christianity. The priests believed that the converts had forever and completely abandoned their pagan beliefs and customs. But in fact, they had simply added Christianity to their complex mix of supernatural traditions. As long as it didn't challenge their overall framework, Christianity was okay. Indians were capable of compartmentalizing old and new beliefs, adopting elements of the Christian faith and Hispanic culture that they considered useful (or that were forced upon them). But they were never willing to abandon their core culture or unique identity. And they were always prepared, if necessary, to abandon new beliefs if they proved to be detrimental.

In addition to this constant tension between Pueblo peoples and Franciscans, there were also tensions between colonists and Franciscans. Colonists received supplies of manufactured goods (clothing,

metal tools, etc) only once every three or four years. They paid extremely high prices, in part because of Spanish customs duties and tolls, and partly because the overland journey was difficult and treacherous. High transportation costs also made it impractical to export most of their agricultural produce. So their exports were limited to salt, pinon (pines), cattle hides, buffalo robes, and Indian slaves. All those commodities were available for Spanish export primarily through tribute extracted from the Pueblo, but even with zero cost for inventories, colonists' profits were extremely limited.

With high prices and low incomes, the New Mexico colonists endured a very low standard of living, isolation, and other hardships. Only a group of about 35 elite families, favored by the governors, with substantial land grants and encomienda rights, prospered. During the 17th century, new colonists consisted mostly of desperate people with limited opportunities elsewhere, and convicts. The colony remained underdeveloped, and it retained its reputation as a land of danger and poverty. Epidemics reduced the Pueblo population from 60,000 in 1598 to 17,000 in 1680, but they still outnumbered Spanish colonists, who never exceeded 1,000.

The Franciscans, however, were not at all discouraged by the low number of colonists, even though they needed them at times to help intimidate the natives. Priests considered colonists as dregs who set a bad example by stealing, raping, swearing, and drinking too much. Worse, they competed for Indian slave labor. Better to keep the resented colonists as few and as far away from the natives as possible. Without colonists distracting and harassing the Pueblo peoples, the missionaries were confident they could turn the Indians into good Christians. Better, in fact, than the common Hispanics. Priests and colonists also competed for Indian friendship, and each denounced the other group as exploiters, rather than true friends of the Pueblo.

The tension turned at times into violent conflicts between priests and colonial governors, who, above all else, needed to make money. To do so, they established their own farms and workshops, which relied on Indian slave labor. So, they shared

colonists' resentment of Franciscan competition for scarce labor. They also sometimes worried that the priests demanded too much too fast, and that their strict, harsh, aggressive ways might well spark a rebellion. To help avoid that, governors would at times overrule the friars, which of course infuriated the missionaries.

## Pueblo Rebellion

In the 1620s the New Mexico governors began organizing slave raids against the Apache and Ute. The captives would work on the governors' own property, or they would be gifts to their favored colonists, or they would be sold as slaves in Mexico. Although this appeared to be a violation of the viceroy's pacification policy, the governors justified it under the just war provision, which allowed enslavement if the natives defied and resisted Hispanic rule.

In response, the Apache and Ute organized their own counterattacks. Once they had stolen a few horses and weapons, they were faster and better prepared for the next attack. Since the governors had forced Pueblo to participate in the slave raids, the nomadic tribes considered them Spanish allies and therefore fair targets for revenge. Preoccupied with defending against nomadic raids, the Pueblo were less receptive to Christianity, diminishing Franciscan influence. Some Pueblo abandoned Christianity and fled to the nomadic tribes, seeking refuge.

The priests blamed the governors, and they appealed to the viceroys in Mexico City to have all offending governors removed. The governors humiliated the priests, threw them in jail, and sent their own appeals to the viceroys. The viceroys often wanted to consult with their bosses across the Atlantic before making any decisions – a very time-consuming process. Charges, investigations, and recriminations dragged on for years, with governors' estates getting entangled in endless legal webs.

Some Franciscans took matters into their own hands, excommunicating offending governors. One governor's church pew was torn out and thrown into the streets. The friars encouraged soldiers to imprison one governor, and to assassinate another.

The governor at one Franciscan service stood up and called the priest a liar, ordering him to shut up. Later, the same governor staged plays, mocking Christianity. Another governor visited villages and conducted impromptu trials, finding the local friar guilty of siring Indian children.

The Pueblo peoples valued public harmony and serenity. They lost respect for Franciscans, and they lost much of their fear of the governors. They had little but contempt for all Hispanics. While the Spanish divided, the disparate Pueblo peoples united. That was possible now as never before, because for the first time, Pueblo had a common language – Spanish. They also were finding a common identity, and a common cause – shared grievances against Hispanics.

Starting in the late 1660s and through the 1670s, drought reduced many Pueblo to starvation. Once they had traded with the nomadic tribes, but with no surplus for commerce, the nomads now stole what they wanted in frequent raids. Vulnerable Pueblo communities in the Pecos Valley dissolved, joining nomadic tribes or moving to the Rio Grande, making the problems there even more severe.

Even in the midst of a devastating drought and relentless raids, the Spanish demanded the same level of tribute. Disease, starvation, and violence reduced the Pueblo population from 40,000 in 1638 to 17,000 by 1680. But that did not reduce Hispanic expectations and demands. For the Pueblo, the probation period for Christianity and the friars was over. Clearly, the Christian God could not (or would not) protect them from drought, starvation, disease, violence, and Hispanic oppression. The Pueblo peoples once again turned to their shamans and revived their traditional ceremonies, in an attempt to restore some of the lost balance in their world.

Franciscans, governors, and colonists were horrified. In 1675, 47 shamans were arrested and whipped. Three of them were hanged, and one killed himself. The governor planned to export the rest and sell them as slaves. He backed down when confronted with a large group of enraged Pueblo warriors. That emboldened the Indians, because they saw that they could not only intimidate Hispanics, but also overpower them. Clearly their oppressors would never allow them to



return to their traditions, so they began to plan a rebellion.

The Pueblo plotter-in-chief was a shaman named Pope. The heart of the plan was to destroy the Christians and their churches. He attracted a large and growing number of followers. Many of them were men who resented the Christian ban on polygamy. Pope promised each warrior a new wife for every Hispanic he killed.

In August 1680 the rebellion began. Most of the 17,000 Pueblo people, from over two dozen towns, were united by common hardship, oppression, 80 years of Hispanic exploitation, and a working knowledge of the Spanish language. Some Apache bands joined in as well, eager to get even for slave raids. Together, they plundered and destroyed missions, farms, ranches, and churches. They took horses and guns. They smashed altars, crosses, and Christian images. They desecrated churches and mutilated priest corpses.

The Hispanic survivors fled to El Paso or Santa Fe. But Santa Fe came under siege by 2000 rebels, who cut off the town's water supply and tightened their cordon around the palace, forcing the governor and colonists to evacuate and flee to El Paso.

About 200 of the 1000 colonists died in the New Mexico rebellion, along with 21 of the 40 priests. It took the rebels just a few weeks to destroy what it had taken Hispanics eight decades to build. It was the greatest setback ever to European expansion in North America at the hands of Native Americans.

Pueblo restored their native names and traditional culture. A ceremonial plunge into the Rio Grande washed away their Christian baptisms. Polygamy was restored, and Christian marriages were annulled. Pope urged them to forsake everything Hispanic. But the natives were just as selective in rejecting Hispanic culture as they had been in adopting it. New crops and domesticated livestock, for example, were too valuable to give up.

But Pueblo unity, harmony, and cooperation soon dissolved into familiar inter-and intra-village feuds. Their Apache allies resumed their raids on Pueblo villages. Renewed drought brought more famine. Pope was discredited because he had promised

perpetual peace and prosperity. The Pueblo were once again vulnerable, and their weakness was once again exploited by Hispanics. In 1691 a new governor, Diego de Vargas, organized Hispanic refugees in El Paso and reclaimed New Mexico in 1692-1693. In 1696 there was another rebellion, killing five priests and 21 colonists and soldiers, but it was quickly suppressed. Some of the Pueblo militants took refuge among the Zuni and Hopi peoples, who had defied their governor and won their de facto independence.

That was the last major rebellion by the Pueblo peoples in the Rio Grande area. The rebellions of 1680 and 1696 had been bloody and destructive to both the Pueblo and the Spanish, and so they both learned to compromise. The Pueblo accepted Spanish authority. The governor abolished the *encomienda* (tribute). Each pueblo was guaranteed a substantial tract of land, and a public defender to protect Pueblo legal rights in conflicts with colonists. Franciscans adopted more reasonable and realistic expectations, tolerating many (now considered) harmless ceremonies, and looking the other way while Pueblo conducted "secret" traditional ceremonies in their kivas. Pueblo accepted Catholic sacramental and seasonal festivals. Hispanic officials and religious leaders limited their feuding, at least in public. Pueblo and Hispanics relied on each other for protection against nomadic warriors. Together they sustained the colony.

## Chapter 3: New France

### Overview

Spain was victimized during the 16th century by English, French, and Dutch pirates and smugglers. But those European powers had not established any enduring colonies in the New World. France had attempted to establish a colony in Florida, but Spain had no trouble demonstrating the folly of such French thinking. The French decided to try again in 1541, this time much farther north, out of Spain's reach. The Spanish crown didn't even bother trying to stop them, because he figured the French would give up on their own soon enough. He was right.

But the French did establish an enduring trade with Indians at the mouth of the St Lawrence River. English, Basque, and Portuguese also traded there, and they came to realize that fish and furs were the commodities that could form the basis for colonies. But the cold climate limited the number of fur traders, and fishing was a seasonal enterprise.

Trading with the Indians proved to be a complex system of entangling, shifting, fragile alliances and mutual dependence. Indians became dependent on European metals, cloth, and alcohol. Traders were dependent on Indian demand for those products. To cultivate that demand, traders were forced to make concessions, including offering lower prices, accepting Indian trading practices, and sometimes providing military assistance against rival native groups, all of which got in the way of European pursuit of profits. The Indians considered the European traders not as conquerors, but as just another tribe, jockeying for position in the complex world of Indian politics.

Culturally and linguistically, the Native Americans of northeastern North America were divided into *Algonquian* and *Iroquoian* peoples. Northern Algonquians (north of New England) were mobile, dispersed, and dependent on seasonal pursuits of fishing, hunting, and gathering, rather than horticulture. Iroquoians, however, and Algonquians along the coast from New England to North Carolina, had many large, permanent villages sustained by a very productive horticulture, as well as hunting and gathering.

During the late 16th century the French established a summer presence at Tidoussac, on the northern shore of the St Lawrence River, near its mouth. The traders established alliances with the northern Algonquians, especially the Micmac, Montagnais, and Algonkin. During the early 17th century, that trade led them further up the St Lawrence Valley to the Great Lakes, where they established trade with the Hurons, a numerous and profitable group of Iroquoians. That put the Hurons at odds with their fellow Iroquois, the Five Nations, living south of Lake Ontario.

That seemed to be a pragmatic alliance for the French, because the Five Nations Iroquois were inferior hunters and traders. But after 1610, they

gained access to metal weapons from Dutch suppliers who had colonized the Hudson Valley. That made the formidable Five Nations Iroquois warriors better armed than their rivals. French trade was disrupted, and Tidoussac was threatened.

## Fish, French, and Fur

By 1580, 12,000 men and 400 vessels were dedicated to fishing, and whale and seal hunts around Newfoundland and the Gulf of St Lawrence. French, Basque, Portuguese, and English all worked together, with no one country in control. They set up camps in coves where they could dry their fish and turn whales into oil. That brought them in contact with Indian hunters, and it was immediately apparent that both groups had goods that the other group wanted. Indians had furs, while the Europeans had kettles, knives, and beads.

Furs had become scarce in Europe because of overhunting, so there was a market in Spain and in America, and the value of furs was high relative to weight and volume, making them a suitable commodity for transatlantic shipping. Since the Indians gladly did the hard work of hunting and treating the furs, the Europeans had no incentive to conquer and enslave them. All they had to do to make a profit was trade with the Indians and get the furs to market.

Indians had different motives for trading with Europeans. It was their animistic beliefs, not profit, that made European products so attractive. Native Americans believed that all objects possessed some spiritual power, which the Algonquians called *manitou*, and that bright, shiny objects were particularly endowed with manitou. That's why Indians coveted beads and anything made of copper. They would trade furs for brass kettles, then break them up as raw material for making arrowheads, necklaces, earrings, rings, and armbands. Worn on the body (or taken to the grave), shiny metal and beads were a manifestation of access to manitou, and they were therefore status symbols.

Europeans also introduced the natives to alcohol. Indians at first were not impressed with its taste or effects. But they acquired a taste, and they adapted alcohol to their own spiritual and cultural uses.



Spiritual trances that had once required exhausting periods of fasting now could be experienced simply by drinking as much as they wanted as fast as they could. Indian communities highly valued public harmony, which meant that Indian aggression had to be repressed, which was stressful and difficult. Alcohol was considered an acceptable means of emotional release, because it contained manitou, and drunken Indians were therefore not responsible for their violence. But while it could be liberating, it also proved to be destructive when and where alcohol became easily available and commonly used. Binges were limited by sporadic supply during the 17th century.

From a European perspective, trade was simply a business transaction. But for Indians, it was far more than that. For them, it was a form of diplomacy, and it was culturally significant as well. Trade was conducted by chiefs in a traditional ritual of exchanging gifts as a symbol of friendship, trust, and alliance. Appropriate gifts were the best antidote for tears or anger. Gifts opened doors, and freed prisoners, and they even brought the dead back to life. Words were cheap, and cheap or inappropriate gifts were an insult. Europeans were impatient with Indian traditions, but they had little choice but to go along, considering it just a cost of doing business.

Another cost of doing business with Indians was the natives' skills at driving a hard bargain. Europeans thought of Indians as perpetual children, but Native Americans refused to play the role of easy marks. They learned, for example, never to trade with the first vessel that came along, but to wait until European competitors arrived. Indians were proud of their trading skills, but that didn't make them capitalists. It meant less work and more leisure time, which is what they valued most.

It was that utilitarian quality of European goods that gradually took priority over their glimmer and shine. Metal tools and weapons became valued because they were stronger and more effective. Brass kettles were used for cooking, not as raw material for jewelry. Those items meant less effort for Indians, and more free time. As the number of European coastal traders increased, prices decreased, making European goods ubiquitous.

Some mariners weren't content to make a profit selling their products to the natives. They took Indian slaves, transported them across the Atlantic, and treated them like freaks in a carnival, or trained them to serve as interpreters for European voyagers. Eager to get back home, Indians told Europeans what they wanted to hear – stories of riches and Indians yearning for Christianity. Most Indians died of European diseases, however, before they had a chance to return to North America.

Kidnapping Indians changed entirely the dynamics of trade for some native groups. Abenaki Indians along the coast of Maine, for example, were not prepared to stop trading with the despised Europeans, but transactions were no longer a matter of ritual ceremony, friendship, or diplomacy. They were no longer even cordial. Trade vessels were required to approach the shore at places where rocks and violent breakers made doing so very treacherous. Europeans had to stay in their boat, while goods were transferred using rope, and only essential goods were part of the transaction. As the traders left, the natives showed their appreciation by the Indian equivalent of flipping off and mooning the Europeans, laughing at them with scorn and contempt.

By the mid-17th century, the northeastern Algonquians had abandoned their stone tools and weapons and the skills needed to produce them, leaving them totally dependent on trade with Europeans. Without it, they faced hunger and destruction by their enemies. They now hunted throughout the year to increase their purchasing power. They killed animals, especially beaver, at an unprecedented rate, no longer restrained by their animistic beliefs, depleting the local supply. New conflicts developed as they expanded their hunting activities into neighboring territories, especially victimizing those who had not traded with Europeans, and therefore had inferior weapons. Those natives were forced to stay closer to home, opening up their hunting grounds for the intruders.

European goods were no longer luxury items, but necessities for survival. There had always been intertribal wars, but now those with European weapons were able to destroy those without them. In addition to new hunting grounds, the victors took

women and children as replacements for those lost to European diseases. European trade became an inescapable combination of commerce and violence, pitting Indian against Indian in a life-or-death struggle. Every native group struggled to attract traders for themselves and keep them away from rival tribes. This environment gave traders a competitive edge, increasing their profits, motivating ever-expanding trade, and producing fierce competition between and within European nationalities.

Trading companies were tempted to establish permanent fortified posts, because they would attract more Indians than passing vessels could, and they would scare away potential competitors. But they would also likely attract colonists, who could easily decide to become traders themselves, increasing unwanted competition.

## **New France**

The French, at the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th, focused on Tadoussac (on the Gulf of St Lawrence) and along Acadia (now Nova Scotia). They established a succession of small settlements, but they failed to keep away competitors, and most of the settlers could not survive the harsh winters. The French shifted their attention back to the St Lawrence (Canada), where they planned to establish a trade monopoly.

Canada was not well suited to agriculture, because the growing season was too short, but it was ideally suited for the fur trade. It was a safe distance from Spanish power. The cold climate produced thick, valuable furs. The resident Algonkin and Montagnais were skilled hunters. The St Lawrence River provided deep access westward into Canada, offering access to many native peoples and therefore extensive trade. Also, there was Quebec, which was located where the river narrows, providing a natural harbor, with high ground ideal for a fortified post.

Leading the new attempt to establish New France, Samuel de Champlain established a small fortified trading post at Quebec in 1608. After two decades, it was still a small colony (85 men), dependent on French supply ships for food, and on Indian goodwill for prosperity, or even survival. The

Algonkin and Montagnais (Algonquians) allowed the Huron (Iroquoians) access to French trade at Quebec, because the Huron were strategically located to control access to the Ottawa River, which was the trade gateway to the Western Great Lakes.

The 20,000 Huron lived in 20 fortified, closely clustered towns, with fields of corn, squash, and beans. They had depleted their supply of furs, so they traded their food surpluses to nearby groups of hunters (Algonkin, Nipissing, Ottawa, and Ojibwa) for their furs, which they carried by canoes on the Ottawa River to Quebec. There, they exchanged furs for manufactured goods, which they either used or traded for furs once again. Almost two-thirds of New France's furs came from the Huron, even though other Indian groups had killed the animals. Excluded from this alliance were the Five Nation Iroquois, living in (now) upstate New York, west of the Hudson, east of Lake Erie, south of Lake Ontario. The Five Nation Iroquois (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca) frequently raided the Montagnais, Algonkin, and Huron, taking trade goods and captives.

New France depended on the fur trade, and the fur trade depended on the Huron-Algonkin-Montagnais alliance. Those groups depended on the French to help protect them from the Five Nation groups. Although the French did not want trouble with any Indians, alliances with any group almost always meant making enemies of other groups. Getting along with all Indians was simply not an option for the French, so they opted to help their trade allies fight the Iroquois. In June 1609, Champlain and nine French soldiers helped their allies defeat a group of Iroquois, and the following year, in the same general location, the scenario was repeated.

As a result, the Iroquois learned to change their battle tactics, and their weapons. They began to insist on obtaining European firearms as part of their fur trade, even though the Europeans had refused to do so up until that time. Increased competition among European traders, and huge potential profits, changed European minds. The Iroquois obtained firearms also in raids against the Algonkin, Montagnais, and Huron. The French were now also clearly seen as enemies, and disrupting

that northern trade alliance was seen as the top Iroquois priority.

## The Five Nation Iroquois

The Five Nation Iroquois lived in large fortified hilltop villages. The women produced enough maize, beans, and squash to keep the men well fed and with plenty of time for warfare. The Huron and Five Nation groups could sustain long-distance, large-scale raids on multiple enemies, but the hunter-gatherer Algonkin and Montagnais could not. Expanded hunting grounds and plunder were an important part of war for the Iroquois, but not as important as obtaining enemy prisoners and scalps, because those achievements boosted individual prestige and influence, and it helped maintain or increase the power of the whole group. So young Indians had strong incentives to become great warriors.

Mourning wars were an Iroquois tradition, with capture of enemy prisoners the primary objective. The loss of a member of their own group was deeply felt by all, especially that particular lineage or clan, and powerful bursts of anger and grief were appropriate responses, in part because they believed that without loud, expressive mourning the dead would linger and possibly inflict misfortune on the village. Condolence rituals with feasts and presents were part of the grieving process, and the best present of all was a war captive to replace the fallen Iroquois.

Chiefs would distribute the prisoners, and elder women would decide whether adoption or death would be their fate. Women and children were more likely to be adopted, while men were likely to face torture and a slow, painful death. The victim was expected to demonstrate his own power, and that of his people, by insulting his captors and bragging about his skills and accomplishments as a warrior. Ceremonial cannibalism would follow death, which brought the whole group closer together and helped prepare boys for the cruelty of war.

Those slated for adoption also faced torture, but much less severe, and it was soon interrupted by a sudden shift to lavishing care and affection. The abrupt change helped the relieved captive bond with the captors. The adoptee was assigned the

name of a recently departed Iroquois whose identity and spirit lived on through the new captive. Those who embraced the process often achieved a great deal of prestige, while those who resisted usually became intimately acquainted with a hatchet.

Similar practices had become common throughout the northeast before the Europeans arrived. And, as gruesome as they seem today, those practices were not much different than the practices of early modern Europeans. The 17th century was not a good period for losers, wherever they may have been. And the 15th century had not been a good period for Five Nation Iroquois, who were constantly engaged in brutal, self-destructive warfare against one another as well as other groups, clans, and villages. Sanity was restored in the early 16th century, thanks primarily to the diplomacy of a prophet named Deganawida and his chief disciple, Hiawatha.

The *Great League of Peace and Power* was established, with no central authority, and no power of coercion by any member. It was simply an agreement to use condolence ceremonies as the means of keeping the peace, instead of resorting to warfare. To the Iroquois, war and peace were a state of mind, and the way to offset the natural inclination toward warrior anger was the periodic public ritual reiteration of peaceful intent. The Great League was the ceremonial and religious forum for promoting calm and peaceful thinking. It was very effective, transforming the five nations from a state of perpetual war into a peaceful alliance and a formidable foe to others.

That's how the Five Nation Iroquois came to see themselves as extremely peaceful, while others viewed them as ferocious warriors. The Five Nation Iroquois were as committed as ever to war, just not against each other. Now their passion for war was directed at outside groups, including the Algonquian-speaking Montagnais and Algonkin. But their favorite targets were other Iroquois-speaking groups who had rejected offers to join the Five Nation alliance. That included the Huron. It wasn't just a matter of revenge, though. It was also the fact that speaking the same language made it easier to assimilate those groups (when conquered) into the Five Nation villages.

In 1633-1635, smallpox and measles epidemics killed half the Iroquois population. The grief-stricken, angry survivors suspected sorcery by enemies, such as the Huron. The remedy was revenge, and war captives to replace those lost through disease and warfare, which now involved deadlier weapons. Indian boys were eager to channel their anger into warfare, and to prove themselves, especially to clan mothers demanding prisoners for adoption and ceremonial mourning rituals. Raids did, in fact, yield captives, but they also resulted in deaths, which demanded more captives and provoked counterattacks, all spinning into a relentless cycle of violence, torture, death, anger, grief, revenge, and mourning.

## The Dutch

Shortly after Champlain helped the Huron defeat the Iroquois, Henry Hudson, an English mariner employed by the Dutch, arrived at the northern end of what was later named the Hudson River. A Dutch company established a permanent trading post there in 1614, initially calling it Fort Nassau, then (after 1624) Fort Orange, and then Albany. This fortified, year-round trading post was for the Dutch what Quebec was for the French. The Hudson River wasn't nearly as long as the St Lawrence, but because it was farther south, the Dutch didn't have to worry too much about disruption of shipping during the icy winters.

The Iroquois, who had been excluded from French trade, now had access to the best European goods and traders. The Dutch offered better quality at lower prices, and they weren't so reluctant to sell guns to Indians. At first, most Dutch trade was conducted with the Algonquian-speaking Mahican, who lived in the area around Fort Orange. The Mahican, it was hoped, would open more trade with other Algonquian groups to the north, opening direct competition with the French. But during the late 1620s, the Mohawk drove out the Mahican and assumed exclusive control of Dutch trade for the Iroquois confederacy. The Dutch traders were forced to accept that reality, and Fort Orange became almost an Iroquois possession.

Now better armed than their Algonquian enemies, the Iroquois stepped up their attacks on canoe convoys on the St Lawrence and Ottawa rivers.

From westbound convoys, they took manufactured goods for their own use, and from eastbound convoys they took furs to trade at Fort Orange. The French established new fortified trading posts on the St Lawrence, Trois-Rivieres in 1634 and Montreal in 1642. Both remained small and weak, however, and the French, ironically, were fine with that. The Iroquois raids were a price the French at Quebec were willing to pay, because without Iroquois hostilities the Algonquians would have started trading with the Dutch at Fort Orange.

Nor were the Iroquois particularly interested in peace with the French and Algonquians. If the northern Indian groups were allowed to freely trade at Fort Orange, they would become the favored trading partners of the Dutch. Better for the Iroquois to steal superior furs from the Algonquians to supplement their own supply of lower-quality furs. It was a strange tacit marketing alliance which allowed the French at Quebec to sell lower-quality merchandise at higher prices to Algonquians, and forced the Dutch to accept lower-quality furs from the Iroquois at Fort Orange. It also served as an odd diplomatic arrangement which kept both sides embroiled in hostilities, but prevented either side from destroying the other.

## Jesuits

The French were well aware of Spanish successes with their Franciscan missions in Florida and New Mexico. But that mission system was not exactly compatible with the fur trade, because Indian hunters had little or no interest in religion, and worse, neither did French traders. Similar to the rivalries experienced in Spanish missions, French priests despised French traders for setting a poor example for Indians, while traders resented priests for unrealistic meddling, and for trying to diminish the hunter-warrior skills the traders relied on. On the other hand, traders realized that conversion to Christianity was a positive for profits, because it would produce more loyal allies and dependable trading partners.

In addition to profits, of course, there was genuine French concern for Indian souls, and that prompted devout wealthy French Catholics to fund missions and convents in New France. They were not motivated only by competition with the devil,

though. It was also a matter of competition with Protestants, so Catholics were determined to win the race for pagan souls to protect them from Protestant heresy.

Europeans in the 17th century did not consider white people superior to others. They considered non-Europeans as socially and culturally inferior, but not based on skin color. Elites, including missionaries, considered common European peasants and laborers as little better than Indians, and they believed Indians were fully capable of becoming assimilated into French culture and religion, which could then make them equal to European colonists (near the bottom of the social scale).

In 1615, four Recollet missionaries (the French branch of Franciscans) set out to convert the Montagnais. But in ten years they could manage no more than 50 native converts, most of whom were on their deathbed, and therefore willing to hedge their bets. In 1625-1626 eight Jesuits arrived, targeting the more prosperous Huron to the west. There they established the Sainte-Marie central mission, with four satellite missions. By 1647, there were 18 Jesuit priests and 24 lay assistants, all better trained, financed, and organized than the Recollet, who faded away. In 1634, Champlain reminded the Huron of his help in defeating the Iroquois in 1609, and he explained that they now needed to accept the Jesuits as the price of continued trade. The French depended on trade as much as the Huron did, but the Indians did not dare call Champlain's bluff.

Jesuits, like other missionaries, considered salvation of souls to be the primary purpose of this life, and preparation for the next life was really all that mattered here on earth. They were, therefore, willing to endure extreme hardship in pursuit of that goal. In fact, the more they suffered, the better their reward would be in heaven. That monomaniacal focus on saving souls impressed the Indians, who cherished stoicism, especially under torture. And the Jesuits also were accepted because they were willing to learn the native languages and go out into the villages to build churches, unlike other missionaries who had required the natives to learn French or Spanish, and to relocate near a mission.

But despite their patience and dedication, priests were unable to overcome the fundamental cultural differences between Native Americans and Europeans. Most Indians simply could not buy into the priests' dogmatism and inflexibility. They believed that there were multiple and relative truths in the supernatural world, which of course was not acceptable in Christianity. Indians had no interest, for example, in a heaven which did not offer fields of corn, fishing, trading, or marriage. Indians would listen patiently and politely to the Jesuits, but in the end the missionaries were frustrated and infuriated by Indian indifference to their message. Indians were perfectly happy to agree to disagree, but missionaries considered that a failure.

Jesuits pulled out all the stops, fully exploiting the complexities of Catholic worship. They had their crucifixes, their rosaries, and other sacred objects with which to impress the Indians. They believed that they had their own forms of magic, such as the ability to induce God to intervene and, for example, heal the sick, bring rain, provide plenty of animals for hunting, or produce abundant crops. At first, Indians were attracted to the magical powers of priests, but when it became apparent that the missionaries could not deliver what they promised, Indians returned to their shamans.

During the 1630s, epidemics killed half the Huron, reducing their numbers to 10,000. The natives couldn't help wondering why death seemed to go wherever missionaries went, and why the missionaries didn't suffer the same fate as the Indians. They wondered why missionaries were so eager to hover over the terminally ill and administer the rite of baptism, which almost always was soon followed by death. It appeared that priests **caused** epidemics, rather than providing protection from them. It seemed that baptism was some sort of lethal sorcery, rather than the gateway to salvation.

Furthermore, Indians often resisted Christianity because they were afraid they would not be able to find a mate, since converts could marry only other converts. And they were told that there were separate afterlives for Christians and non-believers, giving rise to fear of eternal separation from family and ancestors. So, Jesuits needed to convince entire lineages to convert together. Once a certain number had been convinced, the process

snowballed, and that dynamic overrode all the factors that had held them back before. That placed missionaries in a position to demand more cultural concessions, which alienated the Indians. Some Huron argued for killing the priests, abandoning the French, and reuniting with the Five Nation groups. But the majority felt they could not survive without French trade and cooperation, even if the price was tolerating the divisive Jesuits. That decision led to more attacks by Iroquois, now well armed by the Dutch.

## Disappointment

During the 1640s and 1650s, Iroquois attacked and killed with unprecedented ferocity. Dutch weapons allowed them to take the offensive, but Dutch diseases forced them to take ever more captives to replace their losses. It became primarily a mourning war, not a bid for trade dominance. That made the Huron the primary targets, in part because they spoke the same language, and in part because they had rejected repeated invitations to join the Five Nation alliance.

By 1650 Huron villages had all been destroyed or abandoned. Jesuits, dismayed and appalled at the fate of so many converts, rationalized that it really didn't matter, because their souls had been saved. Iroquois destroyed abandoned villages and relentlessly pursued Huron refugees to maximize the benefits of adoptions. And that's how most of the Huron survivors ended up – as Iroquois adoptees. Only a few refugees escaped, and they were assimilated into other groups.

The three independent Iroquois groups (Erie, Petun, and Neutral) soon experienced a similar scenario, with the same result. By 1660, adopted captives had become the majority in the Five Nations, and the Great League of Peace and Power had absorbed almost all Iroquoians. Although it wasn't apparent to other groups, the huge influx of adopted captives led to internal divisions and conflicts. Many of them resisted assimilation, clinging to their old identities and ideas. In the 1670s a number of Huron allied with about 400 Mohawk, seceded, and relocated to a Mohawk group at Kahnawake (near Montreal), forming a new alliance with the French.

On the surface, it would seem that the French were strengthened by that development, and the Iroquois were weakened. But the Kahnawake Mohawk discouraged French attacks on the Five Nation Iroquois, they shared sensitive military information with the Iroquois, and they smuggled Canadian furs to Fort Orange (Albany), where the traders paid higher prices for them. Destruction of the Huron had not entirely benefitted the Iroquois or damaged the French, and the Kahnawake defection didn't entirely damage the Iroquois and benefit the French. Indians pursued their own best interest, and they manipulated Europeans in the process.

New France proved more violent and less profitable than Champlain had hoped. A complex web of unforeseeable events and unintended consequences seemed to always prevent Europeans' colonial empires from achieving their chimerical concepts of command, control, and commerce.