Conquistadors
The Spanish Conquest of the Americas
The Spanish Conquest of America

• The conquistador
  • The “conquerors” of the New World

• Often freelancers, soldiers of fortune
  • Some funded by gov’t, others had to raise their own funds

• Best known are the cousins, Hernán Cortés & Francisco Pizarro
Hernán Cortés (1485-1547)

- Between 1519-21, Hernándo Cortés subdued the Aztecs in Mexico
- Served in Hispaniola & Cuba
- February 1519: Cortés leads 11 ships, 500 men, & 13 horses onto the Yucatan peninsula
The Aztec “empire” more often known now as the Aztec Triple Alliance

- an alliance of three city-states: Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, & Tlacopan

- Area known as Valley of the Sun
Aztecs & Tenochtitlan

• Aztecs: warrior culture based in Central Mexico
  • Waged perpetual war to gain captives for religious ceremonies
  • Made many enemies among peoples of Mesoamerica
• Tenochtitlán: Aztec capital, in the middle of Lake Texcoco
Tenochtitlan

- Lake Texcoco partially freshwater, partially brackish
- Aztecs built roads (causeways) across lake to Tenochtitlán
- Parts of lake were floating gardens called chinampas
- Very productive, multiple harvests per year
Aztec Culture

- Aztecs demanded “tribute” from surrounding areas
- Neighboring peoples required to provide food, raw materials (gold, silver, turquoise, feathers)
- At time of European contact, ruled by Moctezuma (also called Montezuma)
Moctezuma’s Suspicions

- November 1519: Cortés & his men, accompanied by native peoples who resented Aztec rule, arrived in Tenochtitlan
- Cortés initially welcomed, but watched carefully
  - Aztec legends of light-skinned visitors from the east
  - Signs & portents (such as comets)
Quetzalcoatl

[Image of Quetzalcoatl, a重要和著名的阿兹特克神与鸟和地图的背景。]
Cortés: a Daring Man

- Cortés takes Moctezuma prisoner & demands gold as ransom— which he gets
- Then Cortés gets word of more Spanish coming to arrest him for insubordination & treason
- Leaving only 140 men to hold Tenochtitlan, he quickly returns to the coast & defeats his would-be captor, despite 4-1 odds against him
La Noche Triste

- On return to Tenochtitlan, Cortés found his subordinate had massacred some Aztec nobles
- Moctezuma, still under arrest, was displaced as emperor
- New Aztec leaders attacked the Spanish invaders & drove them from the city during the “the sad night” of 1 July 1520
- Heavy losses by Spanish & their native allies
The Spanish reported seeing some of their compatriots having their beating hearts torn from their chests by the vengeful Aztecs.
The Fall of Tenochtitlan

- Cortés & the remainder of his men took refuge with a neighboring tribe who disliked the Aztecs
- After agreeing to a treaty, Cortés & his new allies laid siege to Tenochtitlan for eight months
- The rapid spread of smallpox decimated the Aztec population & destroyed their will to fight
- Tenochtitlan fell on 13 August 1521
Subduing Native Resistance

- Although Tenochtitlan fell in 1521, it took Spain another 60-70 years to fully conquer all the native peoples of Mexico and the Yucatan.
- As with the European settlement of North America, treaties & agreements were made & then broken.
- The combination of war, disease, & overwork decimated native populations.
Francisco Pizarro subdued the Incas in South America (1533)

Like his cousin Cortés, Pizarro was cruel, ambitious, & lucky

He captured the Inka himself, Atahualpa, demanding a large room filled with gold for a ransom

He got the gold, but killed Atahualpa anyway
Juan Ponce de Leon (1474-1521) was first governor of Puerto Rico & leader of the first Spanish expedition to Florida in 1513.

The story of his search for a “fountain of youth” was written years after his death & is almost certainly apocryphal.
Hernando de Soto

- DeSoto (1496-1542) led a years-long wandering expedition through the southeastern area of what became the United States
- First European documented to cross the Mississippi river
- His expedition caused enormous environmental damage & contributed to demographic collapse among Native American tribes in the southeast
PROPOSED ROUTE OF THE DE SOTO EXPEDITION

Based on the Charles Hudson Map of 1997

Herb Roe 2008
Romanticized depiction of DeSoto “discovering” the Mississippi
Francisco Coronado

- Coronado (1510-1554) led a wandering expedition through the southwestern part of what became the United States
- Sought the legendary “Seven Cities of Cibola,” where streets were paved with gold
  - (He didn’t find them...)
- First European known to have visited the Grand Canyon of the Colorado
The Coronado Expedition, 1540–42

Coronado's route across the plains is speculative.
Early Non-Spanish Exploration

- The Italian Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot, ~1450-1499), under English sponsorship, “discovered” North America in 1497
- Giovanni de Verrazano (1485-1528), another Italian, led a French-funded exploration of the coast of North America between the Carolinas & Newfoundland
- First European to visit New York harbor
Explorations of Giovanni da Verrazano, 1524

- Newfoundland
- Gulf of St. Lawrence
- Nova Scotia
- North America
- Atlantic Ocean
- Chesapeake Bay
- Cape Fear
- New York
- Connecticut
- Hudson R.
- St. Lawrence R.
Nueva España
Colonial Life in New Spain
• For most of the 16th century, Spain had the Americas to itself, other than
  • Portugal’s colony in Brazil
• After Cortés’s conquest of Tenochtitlán, central Mexico was gradually subdued
• Spain moved quickly to keep its colonies under royal control
• Spain the most self-consciously Catholic nation
Spanish Government

- Spain introduced *audiencias* to the Caribbean in 1511
  - Combined executive, legislative, & judicial authority
    (in the name of the king)
- An *audencia* of Mexico City in 1527
- Eventually Spain would introduce governmental oversight in the form of Vice-Royalties
- Spain always kept strict control over colonies
Spanish and Portuguese Settlements in the Americas, 1600

NEW SPAIN

- Santa Fe
- Mexico City
- Acapulco

NEW SPAIN (1607)

- St. Augustine (1565)
- Florida
- Cuba
- Jamaica
- Santo Domingo
- San Juan

Gulf of Mexico

Caribbean Sea

NEW SPAIN (1607)

- Cartagena
- Panama
- Bogotá

ATLANTIC OCEAN
Neo-Feudalism

• Spanish colonies were organized & run quite differently than other European colonies

• **Encomienda**: grands of land, including the labor of any native peoples living there

• Natives were often abused or worked to death

• Laws requiring better treatment were rarely enforced
Saving Souls

- Despite brutal treatment of natives, conversion was a consistent goal
- Reconstruction of native culture was not
  - Native languages not banned
  - no mass relocation of peoples
  - Natives’ traditions tolerated (or re-purposed) if not in conflict with Catholicism
Spreading the Faith

- Historian Adriaan van Oss:

  “If we had to choose a single, irreducible idea underlying Spanish colonialism in the New World, it would undoubtedly be the propagation of the Catholic faith.

  “Unlike such other Europeans as England or the Netherlands, Spain insisted on converting the natives of the lands it conquered to its state religion.”
A Multi-racial Society

- The scarcity of Spanish women meant Spanish often intermarried with Indians as well as Africans imported as slaves.
- Spanish, Negros, & Indios were considered the three “pure” races.
- An elaborate, often inconsistent caste system developed over time:
  - Mestizos, Cholos, Criollos, Mulattos, etc.
De español y mulata, morisca.
Miguel Cabrera, 1763

De Mestizo y d'India; Coyote.
Miguel Cabrera, 1763
Spanish Claims

- Until the 18th century, Spanish penetration into the United States was minimal.
- A handful of missions in north Florida & in the Taos Pueblo area of New Mexico.
- Nevertheless, Spain claimed (but neither occupied or controlled) large areas of the U.S., including California & the southwest as well as what later became the Louisiana Purchase.
Spain in the U.S.

- First European settlement in what became the U.S. was a short-lived French one at Ft. Caroline, Florida in 1564
- St. Augustine, Florida (1565) is the oldest continuously inhabited European town
- The Spanish missions in the U.S. were small
  - Used as trading posts & for evangelizing among the native peoples
Profits of Empire

Riches, But Not Wealth
• Europeans expected the New World to have piles of gold just waiting to be picked up
• First gold deposits were discovered in Hispaniola
• Cortés found vastly more in Tenochtitlan, & one of Spain’s principal goals in subduing the area was to acquire more
• The mines in Mexico & South America were Spain’s most zealously guarded possessions
Profits of Empire

- Gold mining was the initial lure, but silver was by far the most lucrative export
- Massive silver deposits at Potosí (Bolivia)
- Slave labor & new mining techniques increased extraction
  - profits went directly to Spanish crown
- Ten million ounces of silver/year arrived in Spain (1590s)
Profits of Empire

- Soon, **cattle ranching** had begun in Mexico, & **sugar production** in the Caribbean
- Sugar plantations were concentrated in the hands of a few planters, who became fabulously rich
- The plantations in particularly relied on imported African slaves, millions of whom died from overwork
Effect of the Influx of Silver

- Huge surge of specie aggravated already-existing European inflation
- The Price Revolution affected Spain most acutely
  - Spanish prices doubled twice between 1500-1600,
  - This undermined the competitiveness of Spanish industries, & the Spanish economy collapsed in the 1620s & 1630s
Effect of the Influx of Silver

- Over time, less silver flowed into Europe but prices continued to rise
- The price of grain in 1650 was five to six times what it had been in 1500
- The consequent social dislocation & misery, along with declining standards of living, forced millions of Europeans to seek a fresh start in the New World: mostly the British colonies in No. America