

# Spain Builds an Empire

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. Spanish conquistadors conquered the Aztec and Inca empires.
2. Spanish explorers traveled through the borderlands of New Spain, claiming more land.
3. Spanish settlers treated Native Americans harshly, forcing them to work on plantations and in mines.

### The Big Idea

Spain established a large empire in the Americas.

## Key Terms and People

conquistadors, p. 46  
 Hernán Cortés, p. 46  
 Moctezuma II, p. 46  
 Francisco Pizarro, p. 47  
 encomienda system, p. 50  
 plantations, p. 50  
 Bartolomé de Las Casas, p. 51

### TAKING NOTES

Create a chart like the one below. As you read, take notes on Spanish conquest and settlement in the Americas.

Spanish Conquest and Settlement	
Aztec Empire	
Inca Empire	
Borderlands–Southeast	
Borderlands–Southwest	

## If YOU were there...

You are an Aztec warrior living in central Mexico in the 1500s. You are proud to serve your ruler, Moctezuma II. One day several hundred foreigners arrive on your shores. They are pale, bearded men, and they have strange animals and equipment.

## From where do you think these strangers have come?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** Spain sent many expeditions to the Americas. Like explorers from other countries, Spanish explorers claimed the land they found for their country. Much of this land was already filled with Native American communities, however.

## Spanish Conquistadors

The Spanish sent **conquistadors** (kahn-kees-tuh-DAWRS), **soldiers who led military expeditions in the Americas**. Conquistador **Hernán Cortés** left Cuba to sail to present-day Mexico in 1519. Cortés had heard of a wealthy land to the west ruled by a king named **Moctezuma II** (mawk-tay-SOO-mah).

## Conquest of the Aztec Empire

Moctezuma ruled the Aztec Empire, which was at the height of its power in the early 1500s. Moctezuma's capital, Tenochtitlán, was built in the middle of Lake Texcoco, near the present-day site of Mexico City. Tenochtitlán was a large city with temples, a palace, and buildings that were built on an island in the middle of the lake. The buildings and riches of the city impressed the Spaniards. They saw the Aztec Empire as a good source of gold and silver. They also wanted to convert the Aztec to Christianity.

The Aztec had thousands of warriors. In contrast, Cortés had only 508 soldiers, about 100 sailors, 16 horses, and some guns. Cortés hoped that his superior weapons would bring him victory. Cortés also sought help from enemies of the Aztec. An Indian woman named Malintzin (mah-LINT-suhn) helped Cortés win allies.

At first Moctezuma believed Cortés to be a god and welcomed him. Cortés then took Moctezuma prisoner and seized control of Tenochtitlán. Eventually, Tenochtitlán was destroyed and Moctezuma was killed. Smallpox and other diseases brought by the Spanish quickened the fall of the Aztec Empire.

### Conquest of the Inca Empire

Another conquistador, **Francisco Pizarro** (puh-ZAHR-oh), heard rumors of the Inca cities in the Andes of South America. The Inca ruled a large territory that stretched along the Pacific coast from present-day Chile to northern Ecuador.

Pizarro had fewer than 400 men in his army. But the Inca, like the Aztec, had no weapons to match the conquistadors' swords and guns. Though outnumbered, Pizarro's troops captured the great Inca capital at Cuzco in present-day Peru and killed the Inca leaders. By 1534 Pizarro and his Native American allies had conquered the entire Inca Empire.

In only a few years, the Spanish had conquered two great American empires. During the conquest, the Spanish and their

allies killed thousands of Inca and Aztec and looted their settlements. Moreover, possibly more than three-quarters of the Aztec and Inca populations were killed by the diseases the Europeans brought.

### Spanish Settlements

The Spanish began to settle their vast empire, which they called New Spain. Spain's government wanted to control migration to the Americas. Most of the emigrants were Spanish, though a few non-Spanish subjects of the king also migrated. Jews, Muslims, and non-Christians were forbidden to settle in New Spain. At first, most emigrants were men. The government then encouraged families to migrate. Eventually, women comprised one-quarter of the total emigration from Spain.

Spain ruled its large American empire through a system of royal officials. At the top was the Council of the Indies, formed in 1524 to govern the Americas from Spain. The Council appointed two viceroys, or royal governors. The Viceroyalty of Peru governed most of South America. The Viceroyalty of New Spain governed all Spanish territories in

## LINKING TO TODAY

### Armored Warfare

The armor of the Spanish conquistadors helped them defeat the Aztec and Inca. Spanish soldiers and their horses wore armor made of steel. The steel protected the soldiers from enemy weapons but was heavy and hard to wear. Armored weapons of today's soldiers include tanks and other large vehicles. Inside these vehicles, soldiers are safer from enemy gunfire.



ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING INFORMATION

1. Why did armor need to be heavy?
2. Why do modern armies still use armor?

Central America, Mexico, and the southern part of what is now the United States.

The Spanish established three kinds of settlements in New Spain. Pueblos served as trading posts and sometimes as centers of government. Priests started missions where they converted local Native Americans to Catholicism. The Spanish also built presidios, or military bases, to protect towns and missions.

To connect some of the scattered communities of New Spain, Spanish settlers built *El Camino Real*, or “the Royal Road.” This network of roads ran for hundreds of miles, from Mexico City to Santa Fe. The roads later stretched to settlements in California.

**READING CHECK Analyzing** How did the Spanish conquer the great Aztec and Inca empires?

## Reasons for Spanish Victory

QUICK FACTS

Several advantages helped the Spanish defeat the Aztec and Inca.

### Causes of the Aztec and Inca Defeat

- Spanish steel armor and weapons
- Spanish horses
- European diseases
- Spanish alliances with Aztec and Inca enemies

### Effects

- Reduced Native American population
- Spanish rule of the Americas
- Columbian Exchange

ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING INFORMATION

Which cause do you think was most important to the Spanish victory?

## Exploring the Borderlands of New Spain

Spain’s American empire was not limited to lands taken from the conquered Aztec and Inca empires. Many other Spanish explorers came to North America. They explored the borderlands of New Spain and claimed many new lands for the Spanish crown.

### Exploring the Southeast

In 1508 explorer Juan Ponce de León landed on the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico. By 1511 he had conquered the island for Spain and founded the city of San Juan. De León also discovered gold on Puerto Rico. Spanish officials appointed him governor of the colony.

In 1512 de León discovered the coast of present-day Florida. The next year he searched Florida for a mythical Fountain of Youth. Though he never found the fabled fountain, Ponce de León acquired royal permission to colonize Florida. However, he failed in his quest to colonize the area.

Two decades later another explorer traveled through Florida. Royal officials gave Hernando de Soto permission to explore the coastal region of the Gulf of Mexico. In 1539 his expedition landed in an area near the present-day city of Tampa Bay, Florida.

De Soto then led his men north through what is now Georgia and the Carolinas. The expedition then turned west and crossed the Appalachian Mountains. De Soto discovered the Mississippi River in 1541. The explorers then traveled west into present-day Oklahoma. De Soto died in 1542 on this journey.

### Exploring the Southwest

The Spanish also explored what is now the southwestern United States. In 1528 explorer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca joined conquistador Pánfilo de Narváez on an expedition to North America. Their group of 300 men first landed on the Florida coast. They faced many severe problems, including a shortage of food.



The group built boats, which made it possible for them to travel around the Florida panhandle. The explorers continued along the Gulf Coast and eventually reached the Mississippi River. Severe weather hit this group hard, and many members of the expedition died. De Vaca's boat shipwrecked on what is now Galveston Island in Texas. Only de Vaca and three other men survived. One survivor was a Moroccan-born slave named Estevanico. His Spanish slaveholder also survived.

Each of the four survivors was captured and enslaved by Native American groups living in the area. After six years of captivity, the men finally escaped. They journeyed on foot throughout the North American Southwest, receiving help from Native Americans they met along the way. In 1536, after turning south, the group reached Spanish settlements in Mexico.

Soon after their journey ended, Estevanico's slaveholder sold him to a Spanish viceroy. The viceroy assigned Estevanico to serve as a guide for a new expedition he was sending into the Southwest. Native Americans killed the enslaved African in 1539.

De Vaca eventually returned to Spain, where he called for better treatment of Native Americans. De Vaca later wrote about his experiences in the first European book exclusively devoted to North America. De Vaca's book increased Spanish interest in the New World. His writings fueled the rumors that riches could be found in North America.

“For two thousand leagues did we travel, on land, and by sea in barges, besides ten months more after our rescue from captivity; untiringly did we walk across the land, ... During all that time we crossed from one ocean to the other, ... We heard that on the shores of the South there are pearls and great wealth, and that the richest and best is near there.”

—Cabeza de Vaca, *The Journey of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*

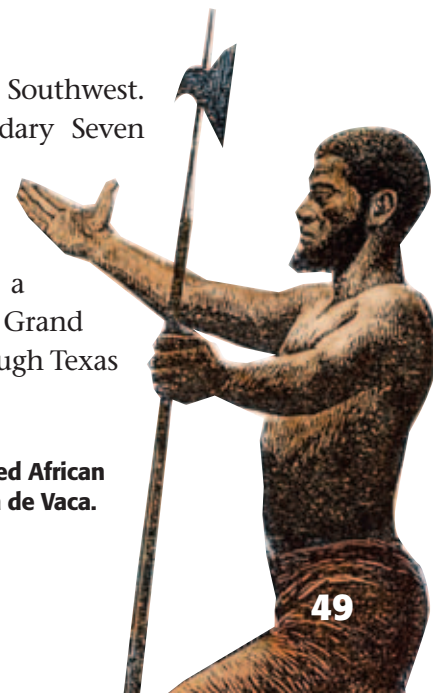
De Vaca's account inspired other explorers to travel to North America. In 1540 Francisco Vázquez de Coronado set out to

## Spanish Explorations, 1513–1542



explore the North American Southwest. He wanted to find the legendary Seven Cities of Gold that were rumored to exist there. His expedition went through present-day New Mexico and Arizona, where a group of his men discovered the Grand Canyon. Coronado trekked through Texas

**Estevanico was an enslaved African who traveled with Cabeza de Vaca.**



## Spanish Viceroyalties, c.1650



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLS

#### INTERPRETING MAPS

- 1. Location** What was the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru?
- 2. Place** Which viceroyalty included modern-day Mexico?

### THE IMPACT TODAY

Roman Catholicism is still the most commonly practiced religion in Latin America. More than 80 percent of the population is Catholic.

and Oklahoma, going as far north as Kansas before turning around. He never found the fabled cities of gold.

**READING CHECK** **Comparing** How were the expeditions of Ponce de León and Coronado similar?

## Spanish Treatment of Native Americans

The journeys of the Spanish explorers allowed Spain to claim a huge empire in the Americas. Spain's American colonies helped

make the country very wealthy. From 1503 to 1660, Spanish fleets loaded with treasure carried 200 tons of gold and 18,600 tons of silver from the former Aztec and Inca empires to Spain. Mexico and Peru also grew food to help support Spain's growing empire. However, these gains came with a price for Native Americans. Native peoples suffered greatly at the hands of the Spanish.

### Forced Labor

By 1650 the Spanish Empire in the Americas had grown to some 3 to 4 million people. Native Americans made up about 80 percent of the population. The rest were whites, Africans, and people of mixed racial background. Settlers who came from Spain were called *peninsulares* (pay-noon-soo-LAHR-ays) and usually held the highest government positions. To reward settlers for their service to the Crown, Spain established the **encomienda** (en-koh-mee-EN-duh) **system**. It gave settlers the right to tax local Native Americans or to make them work. In exchange, these settlers were supposed to protect the Native American people and convert them to Christianity. Instead, most Spanish treated the Native Americans as slaves. Native Americans were forced to work in terrible conditions. They faced cruelty and desperate situations on a daily basis.

The Spanish operated many **plantations**, large farms that grew just one kind of crop. Plantations throughout the Caribbean colonies made huge profits for their owners. It took many workers to run a plantation, however, so colonists forced thousands of Native Americans to work in the fields. Indians who were taken to work on haciendas, the vast Spanish estates in Central and South America, had to raise and herd livestock. Other Native Americans were forced to endure the backbreaking work of mining gold and silver. The forced labor and harsh treatment killed many native people in New Spain.

## The Role of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church played a major role in the interactions of the Spanish with Native Americans. The Spanish king commanded priests to convert the local people to the Christian faith. Some Native Americans combined Spanish customs with their own. Others rejected Spanish ideas completely.

Some European settlers in the Americas protested the terrible treatment of Native Americans. A priest named **Bartolomé de Las Casas** said that the Spanish should try to convert Native Americans to Christianity by showing them love, gentleness, and kindness. The Spanish monarchs agreed, but the colonists did not always follow their laws.

**READING CHECK** **Finding Main Ideas** How did the encomienda system strengthen Spanish rule?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** In the 1500s Spain built a vast empire in the Americas. The Spanish treated the Native Americans harshly in their new empire. In the next section you will learn about other European empires in the Americas.

## Section 3 Assessment

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Identify** Who was **Moctezuma II**?

**b. Analyze** How was **Hernán Cortés** able to conquer the Aztec Empire?

**c. Elaborate** What advantages did the Spanish have over Native Americans?
- a. Recall** Which Spanish explorer received permission to colonize Florida?

**b. Analyze** Why do you think Cabeza de Vaca wrote of great riches that could be found in the Americas?

**c. Evaluate** Why do you think de Vaca called for better treatment of Native Americans after having been held prisoner by them?
- a. Identify** What was the **encomienda system**?

**b. Analyze** Why do you think the king of Spain commanded Catholic priests to teach Native Americans about Christianity?

## Primary Source

### BOOK

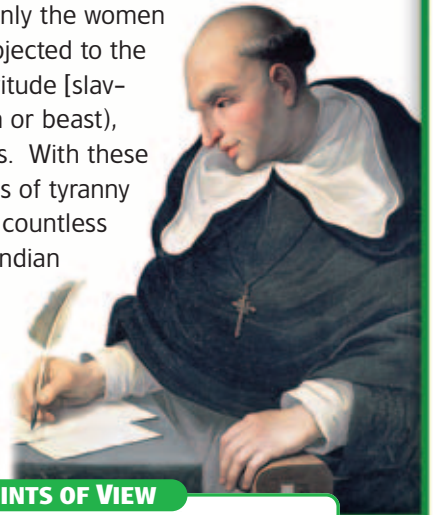
## Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies

*Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Catholic priest in New Spain, encouraged better treatment of Native Americans.*

“When they [Spaniards] have slain all those who fought for their lives or to escape the tortures they would have to endure, that is to say, when they have slain all the native rulers and young men (since the Spaniards usually spare only the women and children, who are subjected to the hardest and bitterest servitude [slavery] ever suffered by man or beast), they enslave any survivors. With these infernal [devilish] methods of tyranny they debase and weaken countless numbers of those pitiful Indian nations.”

**—Bartolomé de Las Casas,**

*from Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies*



### ANALYSIS SKILL

### ANALYZING POINTS OF VIEW

How did Las Casas's view of the treatment of Native American groups differ from the views of other Spaniards?