Global Exploration and Global Empires, 1400–1700

Why were the Iberians the first Europeans to carry out overseas exploration?

What were the main features and impacts of the Portuguese seaborne empire?

What similarities and differences existed between the empires in the Western Hemisphere?

How did the European settlements in North America affect Amerind peoples?

What were the advantages and disadvantages of the Columbian Exchange?

Portuguese Claims in Africa and Brazil

A 16th-century map shows Portuguese claims in Africa and Brazil. Few would have predicted that tiny Portugal would lead the way in European exploration of the globe (see page 19-2).
Morning dawned foggy and damp, but by 8 AM the Portuguese sun was burning off the mist. Already merchants, artisans, vendors, and shoppers were moving toward the docks in Lisbon. It was a typical day in early September 1600, and a fleet had arrived the previous evening from the Indian Ocean. Now its ships were being unloaded and the docks stacked with exotic plants, animals, minerals, and manufactures. Those who arrived early would have first pick from the cargoes.

Cramming the docks of Lisbon was a staggering variety of commodities from four continents. From Europe itself came wheat, wool, brassware, glass, weapons, tapestries, and clocks. North Africa provided dates, honey, barley, and indigo, as well as ornate metalwork. West Africa contributed gold, ivory, musk, parrots, and slaves. East Africa sent ebony, coral, salt, and hemp. Arriving from India were calico, pepper, ginger, coconut oil, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg. Southeast Asia furnished sandalwood, resins, camphor, and saffron. From Macao came porcelains, silks, and medicinal herbs. Finally, Brazil supplied sugar, brazilwood, and monkeys from the Amazon. Lisbon in 1600 was the commercial focus of Europe, a cosmopolitan connector of products and peoples from throughout the world.

Lisbon’s prosperity was a relatively recent development. Prior to 1453, world trade focused on the Mediterranean, where Italian city-states like Venice and Genoa competed with Muslim merchants for cargoes and profits. But Mehmed the Conqueror’s dramatic victory at Constantinople, which at first appeared to expand Islamic power, actually weakened existing Muslim trade networks. By stimulating Europeans to seek overseas routes to the Indies and the Spice Islands, the fall of Constantinople reoriented European trade, to the eventual benefit of the eager buyers who swarmed over the Lisbon docks in 1600.

The Iberian Impulse

Portugal was an unlikely location for a commercial nexus. The Iberian Peninsula, home to Spain and Portugal, sits at the far southwestern edge of the Eurasian landmass, separated from the rest of Europe by the Pyrenees mountains. From the eighth through twelfth centuries, most of Iberia was linked to the Islamic world by Muslim rule. By the mid-1200s, however, fired by the \textit{Reconquista} (Chapter 16), the Christian kingdoms of the North had retaken most of the region. In 1479 the two main Spanish kingdoms, Aragon and Castile, were linked by the marriage and joint rule of their respective monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, laying the base for a united Spain. By 1492, when they expelled the Muslims from Granada in the South, this couple ruled most of Iberia—except for the kingdom of Portugal along the Atlantic coast.

By this time Spain and Portugal, far from Europe’s centers of commerce and wealth, were embarking on great sea voyages that would soon enlarge European ideas about the geography of the globe. Determined to bypass the Muslims, who controlled the land links and profitable trade with East Asia, both Iberians and Italian city-states searched for an all-water route to India, the Spice Islands, and China, regions that Europeans called collectively the East Indies. The Portuguese, who had been exploring southward along the Atlantic coast of Africa since the early 1400s, finally found a sea route in...
1498, arriving in India by way of the Indian Ocean after sailing around Africa. Six years earlier the Spanish had funded an ill-conceived effort to reach East Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic. In the process, and by accident, they discovered what seemed to them a “New World,” and they went on to create a western hemispheric empire that rivaled even that of the Mongols in size and significance.

Like Mongols, Iberians had a warrior culture, bred by centuries of Reconquista. Like Mongols, they used technologies adopted from other civilizations, such as gunpowder weapons and navigational tools from Asia. Like Mongols, they killed untold thousands through combat, slaughter, and the spread of infectious diseases, gaining wealth and power by exploiting and enslaving millions. And like Mongols, they connected cultures.

Unlike Mongols, however, Iberians zealously imposed their faith on the people they ruled. And unlike Mongols they created new societies that would endure even after their empires were gone.

**Portuguese Overseas Exploration**

Given the small size and relative poverty of Portugal, it is surprising that this kingdom started the European drive for overseas exploration. But the forces it set in motion had an immense impact.

Like other European nations, Portugal suffered a drastic 14th-century population decline from the Black Death and the famines and epidemics associated with it. Depopulation of villages and poorly producing farmland left much of the landed nobility impoverished. Some tried to compensate for their losses by turning to plunder. In 1415 Portuguese raiders captured the Moroccan seaport of Ceuta (THA-oo-tab), but Portugal’s small population and limited resources prevented it from conquering all Morocco in a land war.

The sea offered an alternative route to plunder. Portugal was a nation of farmers and fishermen with a lengthy Atlantic seacoast. Following the conquest of Ceuta, Prince Enrique (aun-RE-kə), the third son of the king of Portugal and therefore unlikely to inherit the throne, decided to pursue his own interests by organizing maritime expeditions to chart the western coast of Africa. Starting in 1418, these expeditions sought to determine how far south Muslim rule prevailed in Africa and where the Christian faith could be advanced at the expense of Islam (Map 19.1).

The Portuguese also wanted to develop trade relations with African Christians, including the mythical Christian kingdom of Prester John, sought by Europeans since the Crusades. Slowly, Portuguese explorers and traders moved south along Africa’s west coast. They covered fifteen hundred miles, reaching as far as present-day Sierra Leone by the time Enrique died in 1460. Later generations called him Prince Henry the Navigator.

The Ottoman seizure of Constantinople had stunned Christian Europe and disrupted its merchants. Muslims were now in control of the eastern Mediterranean, the meeting point of three continents and the focus of world trade for centuries. They took over the traditional land–sea trade routes and raised the fees for safe passage to levels that enriched the Ottoman Sultan and cut deeply into European profits. Their middlemen squeezed European merchants even more by marking up the prices of spices and luxury items as much as 1,000 percent. These burdens were enough to convince several Western nations to search for alternative routes to the East Indies.

Henry’s expeditions gave Portugal a sizable lead in this search. Its ships reached the equator in 1471 and discovered that, contrary to legend, the ocean there did not boil. They also found that the heat decreased as they sailed farther south. In 1487, Portugal’s King João (ZHWOH) II dispatched a land expedition across Africa to search for Prester...
John and for a connection to the Indian Ocean and a sea expedition to search for a route around Africa. The land expedition failed to find Prester John but did reach India. The sea voyage, commanded by Bartholomeu Dias (DÉ-ahz), rounded the Cape of Good Hope at Africa’s southern tip and could have gone on to India had not the sailors insisted on returning home. When Dias sailed into Lisbon in 1489, he reported that Portugal had found a way to undercut Muslim traders, since cargoes could be shipped by sea for a fraction of the cost by land. Present in Lisbon when Dias arrived was a Genoese navigator named Cristóbal Colón, whose proposal for a voyage to find a route to the Indies by sailing westward across the Atlantic had been previously rejected by João II. The Latinized version of this navigator’s name was Christopher Columbus.

Columbus’s Enterprise of the Indies

An experienced mariner and cartographer, Columbus knew that the earth was round, and he calculated the distance from Portugal to China at fewer than five thousand miles. He was right about the shape of the earth but wrong about its size. His calculations of
one degree of longitude at the equator were off by 15 miles, a mistake that caused him to think that the circumference of the earth was 18,750 miles rather than 25,000. His sources for the size and locations of Asian lands were also inaccurate. But he was able to make a plausible argument that Europeans could reach East Asia by sailing west, across the Atlantic, on voyages that would be shorter and less expensive than going around Africa to the Indies. Moreover, since the journey would be east to west instead of north to south, the winds, currents, and climatic changes encountered along the way would be less troublesome. In 1484 Columbus presented his *Enterprise of the Indies*, a detailed plan for a westward maritime expedition, to João II, and asked for Portuguese financial support.

João referred this request to a committee of experts, who agreed with Columbus that the world is round—a well-known fact by 1484—but considered his estimate of the earth’s circumference ridiculously small. This committee, relying in part on the 11th-century calculations of al-Biruni of Khwarazm, who estimated the radius of the earth at 3,930 miles, projected the distance from Portugal to Japan at 13,100 miles, a highly accurate prediction that placed East Asia well beyond the range of any expedition that expected its sailors to carry their own food and drink. Rather than reconsider his estimate, Columbus tried his luck with King Isabella of Castile (although female, Isabella was officially a *king*, and she insisted on being called by that title). She established a similar committee that reported similar findings. Columbus was about to try the Portuguese court again when Días returned to Lisbon in 1489 with good news about the route around Africa. Recognizing that Portugal would pursue that route for trade, Columbus sought support from Venice and Genoa. But these city-states, with established interests in existing routes through the eastern Mediterranean, turned him away.

Still convinced that his calculations were right, Columbus went back to Isabella in 1492 and was rejected again. However, as he was preparing to leave for Paris to try to interest the French, he was called back to Isabella’s court. Her finance minister, Luís de Santander (*loo-ÉSS-dá sahn-tahn-DARE*), had scolded his sovereign for lack of imagination and offered to finance the Enterprise himself by loaning funds to Isabella. If Columbus were mistaken, Santander argued, he would die on the voyage and a small investment would be lost; but if, against the odds, he turned out to be right, Castile would have a more direct route to the Indies than either Portuguese or Islamic merchants.

Isabella now gave the Enterprise more careful thought. She and her husband Ferdinand, kings of Castile and Aragon, respectively, hoped to instill a militant, crusading Catholicism in all the Spanish kingdoms and unite them under the rule of their daughter Juana. A new route to the Indies would not only make this unified Spain rich, they reasoned, but also make it possible to convert hundreds of millions of Asians to their faith. Isabella accepted Santander’s offer, gave Columbus letters of introduction to the emperor of China, and sent him on his way with three ships, the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*. Columbus sailed from Palos (*PAH-lōs*), Spain, on August 3, 1492, and made landfall on an island, most likely in the Bahamas, in what is today the Caribbean Sea on October 12 (see “Columbus Describes His First Encounter with People in the Western Hemisphere, 1492”). It was a voyage of fewer than three thousand miles.
Portugal and Spain assume the entire world

Columbus assumed that he had reached islands off the eastern coast of Japan, but the inhabitants did not wear Japanese clothing (indeed, they wore no clothing at all), did not speak Japanese, and did not seem to know anything about Japan. The plant and animal life was unlike anything Asian, and when Columbus returned to Spain in 1493 with samples of what he had found, the general conclusion was that he had landed in an unknown part of the world. Columbus, however, did not agree. He mounted three more expeditions in search of Japan, dying in Spain in 1506 without ever knowing what part of the world he had reached.

Columbus may have been mistaken concerning the nature of the lands he encountered, but Isabella was not. She repaid Santander handsomely and made the discoveries her personal property. Then she appealed to Pope Alexander VI for recognition of Castile’s claims to the Indies and its exclusive right to the westward passage. In Christian Europe at that time, such matters were routinely referred to the Vatican. Alexander, a Spaniard, divided the entire world known to Europeans between the two Iberian nations, drawing an imaginary line from pole to pole 450 miles west of the Azores and the Cape Verde Islands (though they are not at the same longitude). Ignoring the rights of the inhabitants whose lands he gave away, he granted everything east of the line to Portugal and everything west to Castile. The Portuguese, who had not yet actually sailed all the way to India, were outraged and threatened war.

Subsequent negotiations between the Portuguese and the Spanish in 1494 resulted in the Treaty of Tordesillas (taur-da-ŠE-yahss), an agreement that drew the Line of Demarcation 1,675 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands (Map 19.2). Both sides were
reasonably dissatisfied but proceeded to claim their halves of the world. The other European powers, not having been consulted, saw no need to comply; nor did Muslims, who paid no attention to the pope. Still, although Europeans did not yet know about South America, the treaty’s main effect would be to give most of it to Spain, while leaving to Portugal the large eastern section later known as Brazil.

The Voyage of Magellan

The Spanish followed up on the voyages of Columbus by creating an American empire, first colonizing several Caribbean islands and later conquering the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru (Chapter 18). Some, however, continued to believe that profitable trade routes to Asia could be found by sailing westward from Spain.

Thus, while Cortés was conquering Mexico, Ferdinand Magellan (mah-JEL-lin), a Portuguese mariner sailing for Spain, was finally accomplishing what Columbus had set out to do. By now it was obvious that the Americas were not part of Asia: in 1497 and 1498 English expeditions had explored the coast of North America, and in 1513 a Spaniard named Balboa saw another great ocean on the western side of the American continents. But although ancient Polynesians knew the width of the Pacific, no European yet knew this, and the dream of sailing westward from Europe to reach the riches of Asia lived on.

In pursuit of this dream, Magellan set out from Spain in 1519 with five ships and about 280 men. They headed for South America, where for a year they probed the coast for a passage, finally sailing through what is now called the Straits of Magellan in November 1520. For the next four months, with only three ships left, they crossed the seemingly endless Pacific, eating leather and ship rats once supplies ran out. In March 1521, the near-starving survivors reached the Philippines. They claimed the islands for Spain, but the next month Magellan and many of his men were killed in a conflict with Filipino peoples.
Eventually, in September 1522, one ship with 18 men made it back to Spain, having sailed around the globe. Their voyage had proven that it was indeed possible to reach Asia by sailing west from Europe. But it had also revealed that the trip was three times the distance Columbus had calculated, and that given the distance and dangers involved it was not really worth the trouble.

**The Portuguese Seaborne Empire**

The Portuguese, meanwhile, were finding that using their new sea routes was very much worth their trouble. The Treaty of Tordesillas granted half the world to Portugal, and Lisbon set out to make the most of it. Portugal’s new oceanic empire rested on firm foundations: knowledge of currents, winds, and coastlines; superb sailing vessels; and first-rate seamanship. The curiosity of Prince Henry the Navigator turned out to have tremendous commercial benefits.

**Empire in the Atlantic Ocean**

A generation after Prince Henry’s death, King João II authorized the establishment of a fortress and trading post in the Gulf of Guinea in 1482. The next year a Portuguese explorer named Diogo Cão (COWM) found the mouth of the Congo River, eventually establishing good relations with the Kongo Kingdom (Chapter 23). Other Portuguese pressed on toward India, as King Manoel (mahn-WELL) I commissioned Vasco da Gama to sail around Africa to India. In 1497 da Gama left Lisbon, reaching the Cape of Good Hope after 93 days, then rounding it and sailing up Africa’s east coast and across the Indian Ocean to India (see “Vasco da Gama’s Expedition Observes the Spice Trade, 1498”). This was the greatest seafaring feat in European history to date. As a follow-up, King Manoel dispatched a 12-ship fleet under the command of Pedro Alvares Cabral (PĀ-drō AHL-vah-rez kab-BRAHL) in 1500. Blown off course by a violent storm, Cabral made landfall on an “island” in the western Atlantic, claiming it for Portugal before continuing on to India. It was not an island at all—it was Brazil.

Manoel decided to assess the value of Brazil as an intermediate base for future voyages to India. In 1501 he sent a three-ship expedition to the new land, with Amerigo Vespucci (ah-MARE-ih-gō vess-POO-chē) aboard as cartographer and chronicler. In this capacity on a future trip, Amerigo named the entire hemisphere after himself: America. The expedition explored two thousand miles of coastline, leading Manoel to suspect that this was not an island after all. It also brought back samples of a type of brazilwood, a tree whose wood could be used to produce red dye for textiles. This wood gave Brazil its name and Portugal a reason to explore the area further, since it lay too far west to be useful as a way station en route to India. Later, the Portuguese learned that they could make a fortune growing sugar in Brazil, provided they settled it with colonists and African slaves. But for the moment, the Eastern Hemisphere seemed more attractive.

**Empire in the Indian and Pacific Oceans**

The Treaty of Tordesillas, amplified by a papal edict of 1514 forbidding other European powers to interfere with Portuguese possessions, enabled Portugal to avoid European competition in the Eastern Hemisphere for most of the 16th century. Its superior gunnery, vessels, and seamanship held off its occasional Asian enemies. But the Portuguese seaborne realm was less an empire than a network of commercial ports and fortifications, designed not for settlement but for trade.
Vasco da Gama’s first voyage to India enabled the Portuguese to observe the nature and extent of the spice trade. This excerpt from the journal of one of the sailors charts the course of that commerce. Notice the emphasis placed on the dangers of overland travel, the frequent payment of customs duties, and the enormous income the sultan of the Ottoman Empire derived from those duties. All of these facts led the Portuguese to seek a sea route to the Indies in the first place.

From this country of Calecut, or Alta India, come the spices which are consumed in the East and the West, in Portugal, as in all other countries of the world, as also precious stones of every description. The following spices are to be found in this city of Calecut, being its own produce: much ginger and pepper and cinnamon, although the last is not of so fine a quality as that brought from an island called Ceylon, which is eight days journey from Calecut... Cloves are brought to this city from an island called Malacca. The Mecca vessels carry these spices from there to a city in [Arabia] called Jiddah, and from the said island to Jiddah is a voyage of fifty days sailing before the wind, for the vessels of this country cannot tack. At Jiddah they discharge their cargoes, paying customs duties to the Grand Sultan. The merchandise is then transshipped to smaller vessels, which carry it through the Red Sea to a place... called Tuuz, where customs duties are paid once more. From that place the merchants carry the spices on the back of camels... to Cairo, a journey occupying ten days. At Cairo duties are paid again. On this road to Cairo they are frequently robbed by thieves, who live in that country, such as the Bedouins and others.

At Cairo, the spices are embarked on the river Nile... and descending that river for two days they reach a place called Rosetta, where duties have to be paid once more. There they are placed on camels, and are conveyed in one day to a city called Alexandria, which is a seaport. This city is visited by the galleys of Venice and Genoa, in search of these spices, which yield the Grand Sultan a revenue of 600,000 cruzados in customs duties... [about $15 million in 2006 dollars].


Vasco da Gama’s voyage to India opened the Indian Ocean to Portuguese traffic. In 1500, after Cabral bumped into Brazil, one of his ships located Madagascar. The Portuguese established trading posts in India and connected them with their newly founded station at Kilwa in East Africa.

In 1505 the first Portuguese viceroy, or vice-king, arrived in India, and beginning in 1510 the second viceroy, Afonso de Albuquerque, began developing the system of fortified posts at strategic locations that guaranteed Portuguese domination of Indian Ocean trade. This entire region already enjoyed dense commercial networks managed by Arab, Chinese, and Indian merchants. Portugal’s contribution was to connect these networks to each other.

Albuquerque conquered Goa in 1510 and made it Portugal’s headquarters in Asia. During the next five years, his forces took Malacca, the Moluccas, and Hormuz. Portuguese seamen reached China shortly thereafter, and in 1557 they established a trading post at Macao. The Portuguese controlled the Persian Gulf from Hormuz, and their installation at Melaka dominated the passageway from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea. Fortified Portuguese trading posts were located all along the East African coastline and the seacoasts of India and Ceylon.

**Portugal’s Commercial Empire in 1600**

The Portuguese created their far-flung empire skillfully, employing their navigational expertise to master the seas and sail them at will. They guarded their knowledge jealously, refusing to share it with competitors. They carefully selected important strategic locations that would help them dominate Indian Ocean trade, occupying those
locations through a combination of diplomacy and intimidation. Once installed, they protected their positions by negotiating trading rights in contracts that benefited local merchants as well as themselves, giving those merchants a stake in Portuguese success. This strategy enabled a nation with a tiny population of less than two million people to develop a commercial network spanning the globe.

The Portuguese were responsible for establishing regular oceanic trade across vast spaces: between the Atlantic and Indian oceans, between West Africa and Brazil, between southwest Europe and West Africa, and between the North and South Atlantic (Map 19.3). These sea routes regularized connections between these regions and enhanced commercial and cultural contacts between societies.

Portuguese vessels carried spices from the Indian Ocean to Europe, and while this was a valuable trade route, Portuguese shipping lanes from one part of Asia to another were even more profitable. The Portuguese sold Chinese silk not only in Europe but also in India, the Maluku Islands, Borneo, Timor, and Hormuz. Cloth from India, spices from the Malukus, minerals from Borneo, and sandalwood from Timor were distributed throughout the Portuguese empire, as Portuguese ships connected these sites not only to Lisbon but to one another.

In addition to goods, Portuguese sailors and merchants carried diseases from one region of the world to another. Malaria spread rapidly across the tropics as mosquitoes

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MAP 19.3 The Flow of Commerce in the Portuguese World, ca. 1600

The Portuguese impulse to expand overseas created commercial connections linking four continents. Note that a bewildering variety of goods, some of which are depicted in the chapter opener, flowed into Lisbon from across the globe. Customs, rituals, languages, clothing, and ideas moved not only to and from Lisbon, but between each of the ports depicted on the map. The result was a vast increase in cosmopolitanism and knowledge from one end of the Portuguese world to the other. Why did this Portuguese challenge worry the Islamic world?
bred prolifically in the water carried on Portuguese ships. Asians and Africans were generally immune to the most drastic effects of Eurasian diseases, but Brazilian Amerinds were devastated by smallpox, influenza, and measles. More than a century after Cabral reached Brazil, smallpox remained lethal enough to wipe out the entire Amerind population of Sao Luís in northern Brazil in 1621.

In addition to the transmission of germs, goods, and people, the Portuguese spread European culture and practices throughout their empire and scattered bits of information about Asian, African, Amerind, and Brazilian cultures everywhere they went. Building and artistic materials such as rare woods, gems, dyes, and metals were shipped from Asia, Africa, and Brazil to Europe, where they were used in churches, libraries, jewelry, paintings, and furniture. The Portuguese built European-style churches in India and churches with Asian motifs in Brazil. Amerind art was widely sold in Brazil, Angolans purchased colorful Amerind textiles, and Brazilian-inspired furniture graced parlors in Portuguese homes. The Portuguese seaborne empire facilitated widespread transmission of styles and tastes.

This transmission operated in several directions simultaneously. European clothing was introduced in Angola and Brazil, with sometimes comical results: top hats were widely worn by foremen of labor gangs in Rio de Janeiro, and for a brief period, Portuguese-style baggy pants were all the rage in Nagasaki. Brazilian tobacco was smoked in Portugal and coveted in Angola, where arrobas, bundles of tobacco twisted into ropes and soaked in molasses, became so popular that they were used as currency. West African foods and words entered the culture of eastern Brazil, and African slaves transported to Brazil by the Portuguese became devoted converts to Portuguese Catholicism while retaining rituals and songs from their African religions. The cross-fertilization of cultures produced by the Portuguese seaborne empire was as stimulating, and penetrating, as the connections generated by conflict and conquest among the many great land-based empires of previous centuries.

The Spanish and Portuguese Empires in America

Once the great Amerind empires had fallen to the Spaniards, Spain began consolidating what had become the largest territorial possession in human history. From California to Cape Horn, Spain controlled everything except Portuguese Brazil (Map 19.4). Subduing Mexico proved relatively easy after the conquest of Tenochtitlán. In Peru, however, the Inca found ways to neutralize Spain’s mounted cavalry, and although they were unable to expel the invaders, they created an independent Inca kingdom high in the Andes that lasted until 1572. Elsewhere the weaker, less centralized Amerind cultures, including the vestiges of the once-imposing Maya civilization, offered only occasional resistance to their new masters.

At the same time, the Portuguese began recognizing the economic potential of Brazil. Their eastern seaborne empire involved profit-sharing with Muslim traders, but Brazil was entirely theirs, and they used it to profit from the growing European taste for sugar. Unlike Spanish America, with its centralized Amerind societies, Brazil was home to native cultures that lived in the inaccessible interior and had not developed central institutions. These cultures fled from the Portuguese rather than resist them but could not provide the labor required for sugar cultivation. Nor, given their small population, could the Portuguese.
Spain and Portugal, two small countries on the Iberian Peninsula on the southwestern fringe of Europe, constructed enormous empires in the Western Hemisphere. European languages, customs, and products spread throughout these empires, while American, African, and Asian resources, customs, and cultures moved through Iberia into Europe. But notice that large portions of South America—the Amazon Basin, the interior of Brazil, and Patagonia—remained untouched by Europeans. Why?
The Amerind Foundation

Spain, in contrast, could construct its empire on the foundations of Amerind societies. Particularly helpful to the Spanish effort was the hierarchical structure of the Aztec and Inca empires. It proved relatively easy for the Spaniards to substitute the king of Spain for the Aztec or Inca emperor at the top of the hierarchy and to expect that the king’s orders would be obeyed without hesitation.

Aztec and Inca polytheism also contributed to this submission. Accustomed to a large array of gods, the conquered peoples interpreted their defeat as indicating that their own gods were weaker than those of the Spaniards. It seemed logical to worship the gods who were stronger. The Spaniards, noting this tendency, did nothing to discourage Inca and Aztecs from considering Catholic saints and angels as powerful gods. Mary, the mother of Jesus, actually had a parallel in Aztec religion, in which one female goddess was the mother of all the gods. Through this blending of Christian and Amerind traditions, the defeated societies were encouraged to accept their fate and embrace the new European faith.

Slave Labor

Once Mexico and Peru were pacified, Spaniards began arriving steadily from the mother country, drawn to the Americas by the prospect of wealth in gold and silver or in sugar production. For labor in the mines and fields they expected to use Amerinds, but Amerinds were not easily enslaved for these purposes. First, smallpox and other European diseases to which Amerinds had no acquired immunity killed large numbers of them. Moreover, those who survived had greatly reduced life expectancies, either owing to Spanish cruelty or because they simply found unrelenting labor unendurable in the absence of the religious significance it had had under the Aztec and Inca Empires. Third, many Catholic missionaries to the Americas protested strongly against the enslavement of Amerinds. They argued to the king that Amerinds were people with souls, not draft animals.

The missionaries’ genuine concern for the well-being of the Amerinds, however, did not extend to Africans, many of whom were soon imported as slaves. With Amerind workers unavailable, the American colonies needed a labor force accustomed to tropical conditions. There were not enough men in all Iberia to supply this labor force, and if there had been, few could have survived manual labor in tropical climates for very long.

Here the Portuguese took the lead. Having experienced serious labor shortages in Brazil, they imported slaves from trading posts that they had established along the west coast of Africa. Spain followed, and before long Portuguese and Spanish ships carried human cargoes from West Africa, thousands upon thousands of slaves to be sold at auction in the port cities of Central and South America. Iberian America quickly became a mixed society of people of Amerind, European, and African descent who produced a physical and cultural blending unlike anything in the Eastern Hemisphere.

Government and Administration

Governing such diverse and distant empires required new strategies. At first Isabella of Castile, who owned Spanish America outright by virtue of Santander’s financing and the Treaty of Tordesillas, simply appointed her chaplain to administer the entire area. When this overworked priest died in 1503, one year after Isabella herself, her husband Ferdinand established a Board of Trade to oversee the increasingly profitable transatlantic commerce. After the final unification of Spain in 1516 under Carlos I (who three years later also became Holy Roman Emperor Charles V), the Americas were governed through councils. Rather than delegate responsibility to a number of ministries or departments (as was done in France and England), authority was assigned in 1524 to a single board, the Council of the Indies.
The Council of the Indies supervised every aspect of governance in Spanish America, including legislative, judicial, commercial, financial, military, and religious matters. Meeting in Seville between three and five hours daily, it approved all significant expenditures, decided which Spanish laws should apply unchanged in the New World, drafted revisions for those that required adjustment, and advised the king on everything pertaining to colonial affairs. Formal votes were not unheard of, but usually the Council reached agreement on important matters before submitting its unanimous recommendations to the king for review.

But distance proved to be the most significant difficulty facing those who tried to govern the Western Hemisphere. Sailing from Portugal to Brazil took an average of seventy to one hundred days; from Spain to Panama, about seventy-five. Troublesome winds and currents made the return trip even longer. Atlantic crossings were always unpleasant, often dangerous, and occasionally fatal. Ships from the Americas, laden with treasure and exotic goods, were frequently set upon by pirates, although convoys protected by warships eventually reduced this danger. Royal orders and colonial reports took months to cross the Atlantic and were often lost altogether.

The empires thus could not be run from Iberia. Kings and councils might issue laws and edicts, but who would enforce them in America? Clearly agents of unquestionable loyalty were required, men who knew the royal will instinctively, without having to ask questions at every turn. The rulers found such agents in their viceroyos, or “vice-kings.”

Viceroyos were responsible for the execution of the king’s orders on virtually every aspect of colonial administration. Until 1717 there were two viceroyalties in Spanish America: New Spain (from California south to Panama, including the Caribbean), and Peru (from Panama south to Cape Horn). In the 18th century, Peru was subdivided into two additional viceroyalties because of its overwhelming size.

Portuguese America developed in a less centralized fashion. King João III in 1534 divided the eastern seaboard into 12 hereditary captaincies, varying in width between 100 and 270 miles and extending indefinitely into the uncharted interior. The proprietors were responsible for the recruitment of settlers and the economic development of their captaincies. The system never worked effectively, and in 1549 João III placed Brazil under the direct administration of a governor-general, whose duties were similar to those of a Spanish-American viceroy. This action accelerated development and attracted thousands of Portuguese settlers to Brazil.

Whether Spanish or Portuguese, these vice-kings were men of talent and expertise, but the principal qualification for the post was loyalty to the king. They had to make decisions in the king’s best interests even when the king’s orders might be impractical or irrelevant to conditions in the New World. Under such circumstances, the Spanish viceroy could delay implementation or initiate a reassessment of the situation by invoking the Spanish legal maxim, “I obey but I do not enforce.” Portuguese governors-general acted similarly, but without the maxim. A wise monarch would consider such an opinion carefully before overruling his representative.

But the kings of Spain and Portugal were customarily suspicious, and viceroyos, like the officials who served under them, were always subject to the residencia (rez-ih-DEHN-sih-ah). This was a thorough audit of all the appointee’s actions during his term of office. It was conducted by a royal bureaucrat sent from the mother country, and it restrained those who might otherwise have been tempted to engage in illegal activity or abuse of power.

All authority came from the king. Neither Spanish nor Portuguese America contained any institution providing representation within the government for ordinary people. Spain itself had such a body, called a cortés, but because it was a representative institution that restricted royal power, Spanish kings refused to introduce it into the empire. The only truly representative body in the Spanish Empire was the town council, which maintained roads, policed the streets and markets, and regulated local affairs. But the authority of town councils was limited to the towns themselves. The extensive
centralized powers exercised by the Iberian kings over their American empires helped them hold those distant territories for more than three centuries.

The Colonial Church

Iberian expansion was driven not only by a quest for gold and glory, but also by the desire to save the souls of Amerinds, who had never before heard the message of Jesus Christ. That ambitious goal was pursued by the Spanish and Portuguese branches of the Roman Catholic Church.

Ferdinand and Isabella, calling themselves “the Catholic kings,” had completed the Reconquista by 1492 and had made Catholicism an element of Spanish nationality that helped bring unity to their diverse kingdoms. In America Catholicism would help assimilate conquered peoples into either Spain’s or Portugal’s colonial order. The pope supported this effort, granting the Iberian monarchs extensive rights over the appointment of bishops, the activities of religious orders, and the organization of all Catholic undertakings in the Western Hemisphere. In return, the kings assumed responsibility for supervising the Church in its evangelical, educational, and charitable efforts overseas.

At first these efforts were directed by the Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian religious orders. They concentrated on converting Amerind chiefs, who then saw to it that their people would be baptized. To preach to the newly converted and teach them the elements of the faith, the friars learned dominant Amerind languages and promoted their widening use as a means of centralization.

The Amerinds reacted to conversion in a variety of ways. Some were enthusiastic, eager to worship the new gods who had proven themselves stronger than the old. Others converted for practical reasons, considering it both wise and useful to adopt the belief system of the conquerors. Still others rebelled, like the Inca of the central Andes, who objected to the destruction of their mummies and idols. Considering this destruction to be sacrilegious, bringing natural disasters and diseases, these Inca rebels returned to their ancient beliefs in the 1560s. Their action provoked a stern response from the viceroyalty of Peru, which worked vigorously over the next decade to eliminate the movement.

By 1549 in Brazil and 1572 in Spanish America, priests from the Jesuit order arrived and quickly became influential. Emphasizing similarities between native belief systems and Catholicism, as they did in China (see Chapter 21), they defended their Amerind followers against many who wished to enslave them. As did the other orders, the Jesuits grew prosperous through their access to native labor. The Church thus became wealthy and earned the resentment of colonial elites. In a land without a banking system, the Church became the principal source of funds for agricultural or commercial investment. It also became the largest property owner in the Western Hemisphere and a powerful manufacturer of pottery, fabrics, and leather goods.

Education in the colonies was handled exclusively by the Church. It operated all primary and secondary schools, educated Amerinds as part of the conversion process, and founded institutions of higher education such as the Universities of Mexico (Mexico City) and San Marcos (Lima), both established in 1551. In Brazil, however, the Portuguese Church did not establish a university until the 19th century. Before that, Brazilians seeking a university degree had to pursue it in Europe.

Religious orders for women expanded during the colonial period and played a major role in social and economic life. Convents attracted Spanish women who wanted to manage their own affairs, obtain a good education, and live lives of piety and service.
Some women entered convents in order to escape the burdens imposed by husbands and children, or to lead well-protected lives. Most, however, took their vows seriously and contributed greatly to colonial life. Much more important in Spanish than in Portuguese America, convents owned substantial properties, provided funds for investment, and cultivated literary and artistic pursuits. Through its male and female orders, its strong belief in the importance of its work, and its active involvement with Amerinds, the colonial Church exercised a powerful influence over Iberian America.

**Society in the Iberian Empires**

The people of Spain and Portugal were predominantly white, although a few Iberians were of African descent. But Spanish and Portuguese America contained a great many racial and ethnic groups, and in the Iberian empires a new social order emerged.

**THE IBERIAN-AMERICAN SOCIAL HIERARCHY.** At the top of the social ladder were white Spaniards and Portuguese, who tended to consider free people of other races as undesirable mestizos (*mes*-TE-zós). Mestizos were people of mixed descent, often the result of unions between the invading Iberians—almost all of whom were male—and Amerinds. Children born from Iberian-African unions were termed *mulatto*. Only 5 percent of these unions were marriages, and children born outside of marriage were discriminated against. In Spanish America, whites excluded such people from artisan guilds in the 1540s, from the priesthood in 1555, and from any position carrying with it the possibility of social advancement. Children of mixed race were not, of course, exclusively the product of Iberian-Amerind or Iberian-African unions; Amerinds and Africans interacted as well. The result has been a racial mixture found nowhere else on earth.

As time went on, increasing numbers of Africans were imported to make up for the high death rate among slaves. The Spanish and Portuguese did not encourage slave family formation, as it proved far less expensive to buy and transport Africans than to raise African children to adulthood. Male and female slaves were customarily housed separately. Slaves performed all sorts of physical labor and menial services, ranging from domestic chores and handicrafts to the difficult and life-shortening occupations of miner and field hand.

Iberia had long had slaves, both from Islamic areas and from sub-Saharan Africa, and neither Spaniards nor Portuguese considered black Africans a slave race. For Iberians, enslavement was a matter of social class or wartime misfortune, and it was possible for slaves to purchase their freedom. Still, slavery was a brutal, degrading institution, and even those able to buy their way out of it found their lives severely restricted. Many officials and most Iberians treated all Africans as slaves, even if they were legally free.

Africans, free or unfree, lived on the margins of society in the Iberian empires, as did Amerinds. Africans were subjected to a superficial assimilation, and they hid their culture and customs away from the view of whites. Amerinds converted to Catholicism in large numbers, but most proved less adaptable than Africans to the Iberian colonial way of life. Thus, many Spaniards and Portuguese valued Africans over native peoples as workers.

In their own villages, however, Amerinds maintained independent, largely self-sufficient lifestyles based on their traditional social structures. Spaniards and Portuguese forced Amerinds to work through labor exchanges, in which Amerind villages were compelled to provide a specified number of adults for forced labor for a specified number of days each year. Amerinds adapted themselves to market structures and unwillingly interacted with the Iberian agricultural world. But they played little or no role in colonial town or city life, leaving skilled labor to mestizos and free Africans.
Social class in Iberian America was not based primarily upon skin color, although race was certainly an important factor. Portuguese and Spanish societies were organized according to a European structure of three estates: clergy, nobility, and commoners. The upper levels were reserved for high-ranking bishops and nobles, although Spanish colonial nobles tended to be lower-ranking dignitaries who had earned their ennoblement through military service during or after the Spanish conquests in America. The highest-ranking Spanish nobles had no motivation to go to America, except occasionally as a viceroy or general.

Colonial nobles distinguished themselves from commoners largely by their ownership of great estates. On those lands the nobles built lavish manor houses and presided over large numbers of laborers, servants, and slaves. Most Spaniards in America, of course, were commoners, and they earned their livings as shopkeepers, clerks, overseers, doctors, lawyers, notaries, accountants, merchants, craftsmen, or manual laborers. Some were wealthy, others were poor, but all were European in origin.

Mestizos, excluded from many lines of work, often had to make their living by their wits and skills. By the early 1600s, many had found niches as silversmiths, wheelwrights, tailors, and carpenters, but most worked as servants or unskilled laborers. Free Africans and Amerinds were even less fortunate. Constrained by descent and skin color, they could never move into the commoner class.

Among whites of Iberian descent, one additional distinction was made—between peninsulares (pehn-ihn-soo-LAH-rəz) and criollos (kri-ō-loz). Peninsulares were white people born in the Iberian Peninsula (hence their name). They monopolized the highest offices in church and state and looked down on criollos, white people born in the Western Hemisphere. The names of these groups varied in Portuguese America, but the principle remained the same. The distinction arose with the efforts of Iberian kings to fill the most important positions in their empires with men of social stature whom they knew well. But over time, peninsular status came to be required even for midlevel colonial positions, and eventually the poorest Iberian-born newcomer considered himself the social superior of people whose families had been born and prospered in America for generations. This unfair treatment angered criollos, alienating many who might otherwise have remained loyal to their king but who later gladly joined independence movements.

Women play significant economic roles in the Iberian empires

The Role of Gender. Gender distinctions were particularly evident in the Iberian colonial economy. Elite white women usually married, raised large families, and as widows administered the estates of their late husbands. But they could not engage in professional or commercial activity, and those who were frustrated by patriarchal restrictions frequently entered convents in order to gain limited autonomy. Middle- and lower-class white women worked at a wide variety of occupations, including spinning thread, taking in laundry, sewing, peddling goods, selling food, and serving as free domestics in the homes of the elite. Amerind women dominated the town marketplaces as food vendors. Free African women were restricted to domestic service and cooking in inns and marketplaces. Most free women performed some type of paid labor during much of their lives. Survival in Iberian America below the level of the elites was not easy, and women’s incomes, however meager, were badly needed.

Amerinds and Europeans in North America

Before the 16th century, the peoples of North America were largely isolated from the rest of the world. Influenced only by occasional trade with Mesoamerican cultures that flourished to their south, the numerous tribes and nations of North American Amerinds developed distinctive cultures, values, beliefs, and institutions, without having to deal with outside interference.
Then, in the 16th century, European explorers began to map the continent’s coastlines and rivers, looking for gold and a passageway to Asia. In the 17th century, having found neither, Europeans started settling in North America, exploiting its resources and farming its lands. In the process, the intruders displaced the Amerinds, whose numbers were already diminished by European diseases.

Coalitions and Contacts

North of Mexico there were no great settled empires like those that existed in the Eastern Hemisphere. Most North Americans lived in village-based societies that rarely included more than a few thousand people, and even the larger nations probably numbered only in the hundreds of thousands. Usually these societies were ruled by powerful kings or chiefs who exercised religious and political authority. They presided over rituals aiming to establish harmony with the spirits of nature, and over councils made up of prominent warriors and advisors.

Occasionally some societies combined for protection but rarely surrendered their autonomy. In the 1500s, for example, the Haudenosaunee (HOW-din-O-SAW-na) people of what is now upstate New York organized themselves into a League of Five Nations, later called the Iroquois (EAR-uh-kwoy) Confederacy. According to oral tradition, a legendary figure called the Peacemaker, along with a mighty chief known as Hiawatha, persuaded regional leaders to end their constant warfare and join together for the common good. But the League, despite an intricate governance system, was more an alliance than a union: each of its five members (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk) remained a sovereign nation.

North American Amerinds were politically divided and culturally diverse, but they were not isolated from each other. Using the continent’s extensive river systems, they could attack their enemies, travel to distant hunting and fishing grounds, conduct long-distance trade, and maintain a network of contacts with other societies.

Through contacts with Mexico, some North Americans knew that there was a powerful, wealthy empire to their south. They could not know, however, that there existed across the ocean mightier and wealthier empires, whose warriors carried weapons against which the Amerinds had no defense and diseases against which they had no immunity. Unlike Asians, Africans, and Europeans, who constantly feared conquest by more powerful neighbors, North Americans did not anticipate the catastrophe to come.

The Coming of the Europeans

Not long after the first voyage of Columbus, Europeans looking for a new route to Asia began arriving in North America. In 1497 Italian mariner Giovanni Caboto explored the northeast coast, staking a claim for his English employers, who called him John Cabot. In 1500 Portuguese explorers reached Newfoundland; soon fishermen from Portugal, England, and France were fishing the cod-rich waters off the northeastern banks. They also made contact with coastal Amerinds, who proved willing to trade food and furs for European trinkets and tools.

In the following decades, while the Spanish conquered the Aztecs and built an empire in Mexico, French and English explorers farther north found neither gold nor a climate in which sugar would grow. Lacking such financial incentives, Europeans in the 16th century made little effort to colonize the north.

After 1600, however, as the French, Dutch, and English challenged the dominance of Spain, Europeans began to establish permanent settlements in North America. Enchanted by a voyage up
the Saint Lawrence River in 1603, French explorer Samuel de Champlain helped start a small colony in Acadia (now Nova Scotia) the next year and founded a settlement at Quebec in 1608. Eventually he established good relations with the region’s Huron Amerinds, using French forces and firearms to help them defeat their Iroquois foes. He also helped the Hurons develop a profitable trade in furs. French fur traders followed, as did soldiers who fought the Iroquois, Jesuits who spread Christianity, and explorers who traveled the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. By century’s end the French had claimed these regions as a colony called New France (Map 19.5), based mainly on the fur trade with the Amerinds, most of whom were unaware that their lands were now supposedly subject to someone called the king of France.

Meanwhile other Europeans were arriving. In 1607 about a hundred hearty Englishmen, searching for gold and adventure, founded an outpost called Jamestown (named for King James I) in a region they knew as Virginia (named for Elizabeth I, the “Virgin
Europeans establish colonies in North America.

In 1609 Henry Hudson, sailing for the Dutch, traveled up the great river that now bears his name, seeking a new passage to Asia. He found no such route but did discover a region rich in furs. In the 1620s the Dutch founded the colony of New Netherland, which four decades later was seized by the English and renamed New York. In 1620 about 50 self-styled “Pilgrims” and 50 other English voyagers arrived at a place they named Plymouth, in a region soon called New England. Within a few decades, thousands of other English Puritans, seeking religious freedom, had joined them in forming a Massachusetts Bay Colony. Other English religious groups followed: Catholics created a Maryland colony in the 1630s, and Quakers founded Pennsylvania in the 1680s. By 1700 there was a string of English colonies along the Atlantic coast.

**Disease and Demographic Decline**

The coming of the Europeans brought disaster to the North American Amerinds. Like their Spanish rivals to the South, the French, Dutch, and English brought deadly diseases to which the Amerinds had no immunity. Europeans also brought agricultural techniques involving large farm animals, metal tools and plows, and crops that required the clearing of huge tracts of forest. With a concept of possession that let individuals claim land parcels as their property and exclude all others, they constantly expanded the amount of land under cultivation. Over time these practices, combined with growing numbers of European immigrants, destroyed the Amerinds’ way of life.

At Jamestown, for example, the colonists at first related well to the local Powhatan (POW-ub-TAHN) peoples, who provided the newcomers with corn, meat, and fish that helped the colony survive. But as more settlers arrived from England and the Powhatans were ravaged by European diseases, the relationship changed. The peoples clashed, the Amerinds attacked, and the English responded by seizing Powhatan lands. Then, rather than planting food, the colonists grew tobacco, which Amerinds had taught them how to cultivate, and shipped it for sale to England, where smoking became the rage. Within decades the whole region was covered by tobacco plantations, and surviving Amerinds were forced off their lands.

At Plymouth the colony initially survived with the aid of Massasoit (mass-uh-SÖ-it), chief of the Wampanoag (wahm-pub-NÖ-ug) nation, who in 1621 agreed to help the Pilgrims if they would support his people in battles against tribal foes. Soon, however, clashes occurred between the disease-ravaged Amerinds and growing English communities, which rapidly claimed increasing amounts of land for farms and used firearms when necessary to enforce their claims. In 1675, desperate to save the Wampanoag way of life, Massasoit’s son Metacom (MEH-tub-kahn), whom the colonists called King Philip, attacked the Europeans. A brutal war followed, during which the English slaughtered thousands of Amerinds and sold the survivors into slavery. After Metacom was captured and beheaded in 1676, the Plymouth colonists displayed his head on a pole for 25 years. “King Philip’s War” effectively ended Amerind resistance, leaving most of New England in European hands.

To the West, the Dutch and English settlers brought tragedy and triumph to the Iroquois Confederacy. On one hand, as elsewhere, the colonists brought disease, such as a smallpox epidemic that killed perhaps half the Iroquois population in the 1630s. On the other hand, the Dutch and English gave the Iroquois firearms to help them fight Hurons and French, enabling
the Confederacy to carve out an empire extending from the Hudson River to the Great Lakes.

Similar events occurred elsewhere along the coast. Sometimes Europeans allied with Amerinds to fight common foes, and sometimes Europeans slaughtered Amerinds or drove them off their lands. Sometimes the Amerinds held off the Europeans for awhile, but in the long run their way of life collapsed in the face of European diseases, European weapons, and the spread of European settlement.

**The Columbian Exchange**

The initial contact between European and American civilizations involved not only conflict and conquest but connection. Since the two hemispheres had been separated from each other since the submersion of the Bering land bridge more than ten thousand years earlier, many varieties of living things had developed in each hemisphere that were totally unknown in the other. The Eastern Hemisphere had wheat, grapes, horses, cows, sheep, goats, and pigs; the Western Hemisphere had potatoes, tomatoes, maize, cacao, and tobacco. When people from the two hemispheres encountered one another, their connections involved an interchange of crops and animals. In reference to Christopher Columbus, scholars call this process the Columbian Exchange.

Some exchanges of crops improved the quality of life in both hemispheres. The impact was immediately obvious in the Western Hemisphere. Before long wheat and grapes were being grown for the first time in the New World, to make the bread and wine that were central to the European diet and religion. Farm animals brought in by the Iberians provided transport, labor, and food, and they flourished in the Americas.

For the Eastern Hemisphere, corn (maize), potatoes, tomatoes, peanuts, and manioc (MAN-é-ok)—a starchy root plant, now grown widely in Africa and Brazil, also called *cassava* or *tapioca*—proved hardy and rich in nutrients. Eventually becoming staples in Europe, Africa, and Asia, they later helped foster a global population explosion. Other American plants, like cacao (the basis for chocolate) and tobacco, were also sought by people around the world.

Microorganisms were also part of the Columbian Exchange. Syphilis, for example, a debilitating venereal disease that first showed up in southern Europe in the 1490s, was probably introduced by sailors who returned from the Western Hemisphere. But the exchange of diseases proved far more devastating for the Amerinds. Smallpox, measles, and chicken pox, to which most Europeans had been subjected as children and thus developed immunities, ran rampant through unprotected Amerind populations. About 30 percent of children and 90 percent of adults who came down with smallpox died. As a result, Amerind farming was interrupted, social structures shattered, villages depopulated, and entire regions abandoned. Smallpox weakened Aztec and Inca resistance to the Spaniards. Throughout the Spanish possessions in the Western Hemisphere, smallpox and measles ravaged Amerind communities off and on throughout the 16th century.

There are no reliable statistics on pre-1492 Amerind populations, but scholars estimate that the Americas contained between 15 million and 125 million people. In 1600, Spanish estimates indicated a population of one million Amerinds in the viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean islands). It is clear that European diseases destroyed the overwhelming majority of the Amerind peoples in the greatest demographic catastrophe in history.
CHAPTER 19  Global Exploration and Global Empires, 1400–1700

Tremendous consequences flowed from the Iberian overseas expansion of the 15th century. Under different circumstances, China might have discovered a sea route around Africa, or Japanese mariners might have sailed east and found the Pacific coastline of North America. But it was the Europeans whose curiosity and seamanship broadened human geographic knowledge and extended the horizons of the entire world. When they found previously unknown lands, they conquered and exploited them, motivated by a combination of greed and religious faith.

The clash of civilizations in the New World changed forever societies previously isolated from outside influences. Amerind societies largely collapsed in the face of conquest and disease. In their place the Iberians imposed new governance systems, religious beliefs, and social structures. They created a new economy, based on the cultivation of cash crops by imported slave labor. Finally, they transplanted their whole way of life, bringing plants, animals, foods, and diseases common in Europe but hitherto unknown in the Americas.

The political and economic impacts were immense. The Spanish and Portuguese, and later the French, Dutch, and English, were set on a course to become world powers, surpassing the great Asian and Islamic empires. The Atlantic Ocean soon replaced the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea as the center of world commerce. Eventually, Europe led the world in power and prosperity, in large part due to its exploitation of Africa and the New World.

But the most direct Iberian legacy was the new culture created in the conquered lands. The Spanish and Portuguese empires ended in the early 1800s, but their legacy lives on today. Though modern Latin American societies remain intensely hierarchical, the peoples of these societies, displaying a broad variety of outlooks and customs, celebrate this cultural synthesis as their unique contribution to the human experience.

Putting It in Perspective

Reviewing Key Material

KEY CONCEPTS

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Samuel de Champlain, 19-18
Henry Hudson, 19-20
Massasoit, 19-20
Metacom, 19-20

ASK YOURSELF

1. Why did Portugal take the lead among European nations in promoting overseas expansion?
2. Why did the Iberian nations enslave Africans and transport them to their empires in the Western Hemisphere?
3. In what ways did the Spanish and Portuguese empires differ from each other? In what ways were they similar?
4. How did the conflicts between Iberian and American civilizations forge connections that changed them all?

GOING FURTHER


### Key Dates and Developments

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<td>1415</td>
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<td>1415–1460</td>
<td>Expeditions financed by Prince Henry the Navigator</td>
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<td>1489</td>
<td>Bartholomeu Díaz rounds the Cape of Good Hope</td>
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<td>1492</td>
<td>Christopher Columbus reaches the Caribbean Islands</td>
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<td>1494</td>
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<td>1500</td>
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<td>The Jesuits arrive in the New World</td>
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✔️ Study and Review Chapter 19

📖 Read the Document

Christopher Columbus “The Letters of Columbus to Ferdinand and Isabel,” p. 420

Bartolomé de las Casas, from Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies, p. 427

William Bradford, excerpt from Of Plymouth Plantation, p. 434

🔍 View the Map

Interactive Map: Spanish and Portuguese Explorations, 1400–1600, p. 417

Map Discovery: Civilizations in North America, p. 432

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Christopher Columbus and the Round World, p. 419

Research and Explore

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