

CHAPTER 1

Worlds Collide: Europe, Africa, and America

1450–1620

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“**B**EFORE THE FRENCH CAME AMONG US,” an elder of the Natchez people of Mississippi claimed, “we were men . . . and we walked with boldness every road, but now we walk like slaves, which we shall soon be, since the French already treat us . . . as they do their black slaves.” Before the 1490s the Indian peoples of the Western Hemisphere knew absolutely nothing about the light-skinned inhabitants of Europe and the dark-complexioned peoples of Africa. However, Europeans hungry for the trade and riches of Asia had already sailed along the west coast of Africa and were deeply involved in the long-established trade in African slaves. When Christopher Columbus, another European searching for a sea route to Asia, encountered the lands and peoples of the Americas, the destinies of four continents quickly became intertwined. On his second voyage to the Western Hemisphere, Columbus carried a cargo of enslaved Africans, beginning the centuries-long process that created a multitude of triracial societies in the Americas.

◀ Orbis Typus Universalis

This map of 1507, drawn by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller, is one of the first to use “America” as the name of the western continents. Only the northwestern area of present-day Brazil and a few (mislocated) Caribbean islands appear on Waldseemüller’s map. Europeans had not yet comprehended the size and shape of the New World.

John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

As the Natchez elder knew well, the resulting mixture of peoples from the far-flung continents was based not on equality but on exploitation. By the time he urged his people to resist the invaders, the Europeans were too numerous and too well positioned to be dislodged. The French and their Indian allies killed hundreds of those who joined the Natchez uprising and sold many of the survivors into slavery on the sugar plantations of the West Indies.

The fate of the Natchez was hardly unique. Over the course of the three centuries following Columbus's voyage, many Native American peoples came under the domination of the various Europeans—Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, Dutch—who colonized the Western Hemisphere and imported enslaved Africans to work on agricultural plantations. In the new societies—new to all their inhabitants—race became a prime determinant of people's status and lives. How did this happen? How did Europeans become leaders in world trade and extend their influence across the Atlantic? What was the character of the Native Americans' life and culture, and what made their societies vulnerable to conquest by European adventurers? And what led to the transatlantic trade in African slaves? In the answers to these questions lie the origins of the United States and, beyond that, the dominant position of people of European descent in the modern world.

Native American Worlds

When the Europeans arrived, the great majority of Native Americans—about 40 million—lived in Mesoamerica (present-day Mexico and Guatemala), and another 15 million resided in lands to the north (present-day United States and Canada). Some lived in simple hunter-gatherer or agricultural communities governed by kin ties, but the majority resided in societies ruled by warrior-kings and priests. In Mesoamerica and Peru, Indian peoples created

civilizations whose art, religion, society, and economy were as complex as those of Europe and the Mediterranean (Table 1.1).

The First Americans

According to the elders of the Navajo people, history began when their ancestors emerged from under the earth (see American Voices, "A Navajo Emergence Story," p. 7); for the Iroquois, the story of their Five Nations began when people fell from the sky. However, most twenty-first-century anthropologists and historians believe that the first people to live in the Western Hemisphere were migrants from Asia. Some migrants came by water, but most probably came by land. Strong archaeological and genetic evidence suggests that late in the last Ice Age, which lasted from 25,000 B.C. until 11,000 B.C., small bands of hunters—residents of Siberia—followed herds of game across a hundred-mile-wide land bridge between Siberia and Alaska. An oral history of the Tuscarora Indians, who lived in present-day North Carolina, tells of a famine in the old world and a journey over ice toward where "the sun rises," a trek that brought their ancestors to a lush forest with abundant food and game.

Most anthropologists believe that the main migratory stream from Asia lasted from about 13,000 B.C. to 11,000 B.C., until the glaciers melted and the rising ocean waters submerged the land bridge and created the

TABLE 1.1 Impression Native American Cultures						
Time Period	Mesoamerica		Andes		North America	
	Coastal Lowlands	Highlands	Coastal Lowlands	Highlands	Southwest	Mississippi & Ohio Valleys
Pre-Classic Era 900 B.C.–A.D. 300	Olmec		Chavin			Hopewell
Classic Era A.D. 300–900	Mayan (Tikal)	Teotihuacán	Mochica	Tiwanaku	Mogollon Hohokam Anasazi	
Post-Classic Era A.D. 900–1500	Mayan (Chichén Itzá)	Toltec	Nazca	Inca (Cuzco)		Mississippian (Cahokia)

The Olmec were the "mother culture" to the Mayans and the Teotihuacáns, and the Chavin to the Mochica and Tiwanaku, influencing subsequent cultures in both the coastal lowlands and the highlands of the Classic and post-Classic Eras. These subsequent cultures drew additional influences from the surrounding Native American groups.

A Navajo Emergence Story

Every culture has a story—part factual, part mythical—that expresses the meaning of its past. This story was told to Sandoval, whose Navajo name was Hastin Tlo'tsí hee, by his grandmother, herself the descendant of a long line of medicine women. It locates the homeland of the Navajo people in the Plateau country of northwestern Arizona near Abalone Shell Mountain (San Francisco Peak), where the tribe apparently settled sometime between A.D. 1200 and 1500.

Here are the stories of the Four Worlds that had no sun, and of the Fifth, the world we live in.... The First World, Ni'hodilquil, was black as black wool. It had four corners and over these appeared four clouds. These four clouds contained within themselves the elements of the First World. They were in color, black, white, blue, and yellow.

The Black Cloud represented the Female Being or Substance. For as a child sleeps when being nursed, so life slept in the darkness of the Female Being. The white Cloud represented the Male Being or Substance. He was the Dawn, the Light-Which-Awakens, of the First World.

In the East, at the place where the Black Cloud and the White Cloud met, First Man, Atse'hastqin, was formed; and with him was formed the white corn, perfect in shape, with kernels covering the whole ear.... The First World was small in size, a floating island in mist or water. On it there grew one tree, a pine tree, which was later brought to the present world for firewood.... The creatures of the First World are thought of as the Mist People; they had no definite form, but were to change to men, beasts, birds, and reptiles of this world.

Now on the western side of the First World, in a place that later was to become the Land of Sunset, there appeared the Blue Cloud, and opposite it there appeared the Yellow Cloud. Where they came together, First Woman was formed, and with her the yellow corn. This ear of corn was also perfect. With First Woman there came the white shell and the turquoise and the yucca....

Because of the strife in the First World, First Man, First Woman... climbed up from the world of Darkness and Dampness to the Second or Blue World. They found a number of people already living there: blue birds, blue hawks, blue jays, blue herons, and all the blue-feathered beings. The powerful swallow people lived there also, and these people made the Second World unpleasant.... There was fighting and killing....

The bluebird was the first to reach the Third or Yellow World. After him came... all the others. There were six mountains in the Third World.... In the West... Dichi'li dzil, the Abalone Shell Mountain....

[After climbing to the Fourth World, which was filled with other animals] First Man and his people saw four dark clouds and four white clouds pass, and then they sent the badger up the reed. This time when the badger returned he said he had come out on solid earth. So First Man and First Woman led the people to the Fifth World, which some call the Many Colored Earth and some the Changeable Earth. They emerged through a lake [said to be near Pagosa Springs, Colorado] surrounded by four mountains. The water bubbles in this lake when anyone goes near....

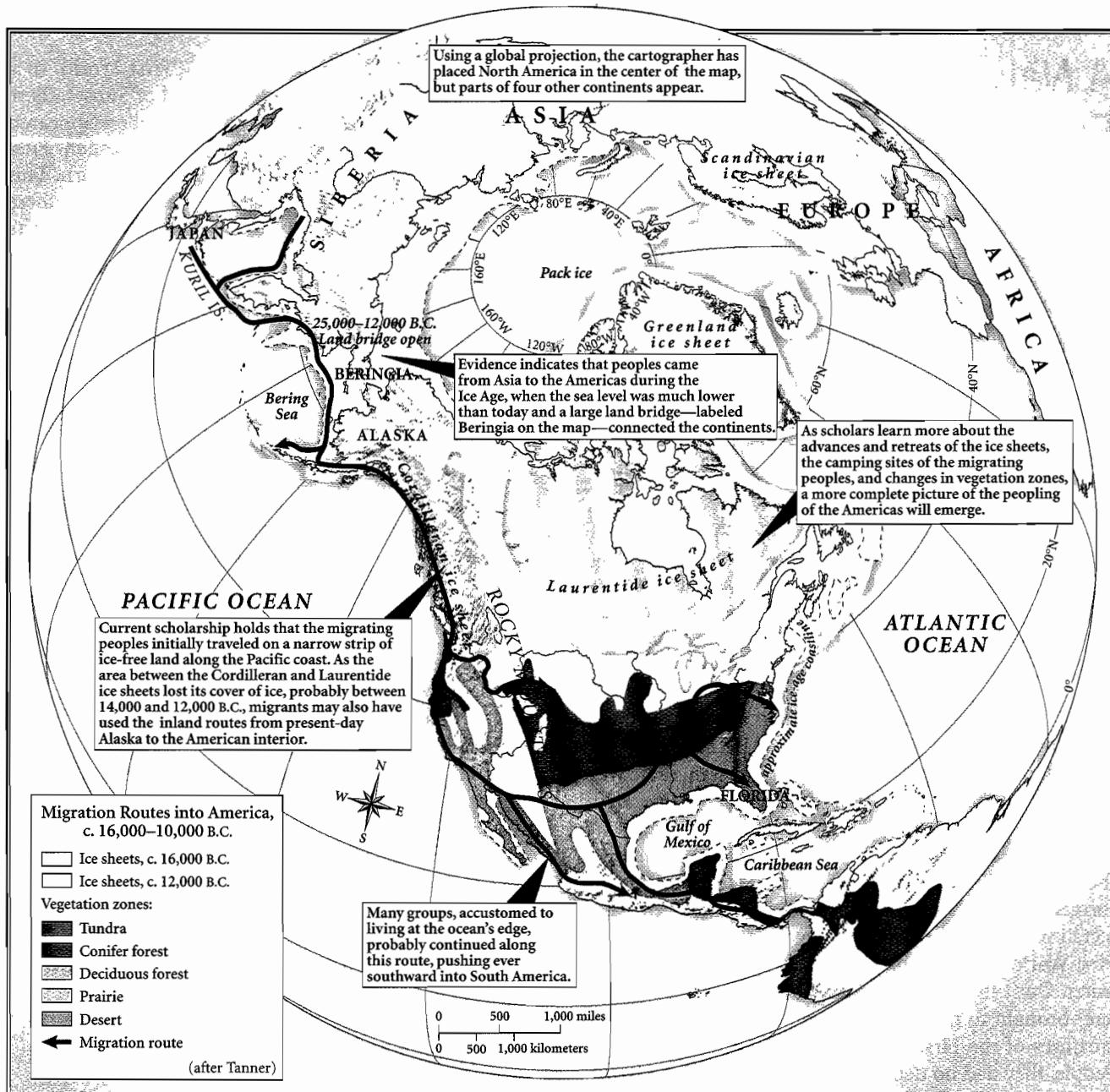
Some medicine men tell us that there are two worlds above us, the first is the World of the Spirits of Living Things, the second is the Place of Melting into One.

Source: Aileen O'Bryan, "The Diné: Origin Myths of the Navaho Indians," *Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 163* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), 1-13.

Bering Strait. A second movement of peoples around 6000 B.C., now traveling by water across the narrow strait, brought the ancestors of the Navajo and the Apaches to North America, while a third migration around 3000 B.C. introduced the forebears of the Aleut and Inuit peoples—the “Eskimos.” Subsequently, the people of the Western Hemisphere, who by that time had moved as far south as the tip of South America and as far east as the Atlantic coast of North America, were

largely cut off from the rest of the world for three hundred generations (Map 1.1).

For many centuries the first Americans lived as hunter-gatherers, subsisting on the abundant vegetation and wildlife. Over time, many of the larger species of animals—mammoths, giant beaver, and horses—died out, victims of overhunting and climatic change; their demise forced hunters to become adept at killing more elusive and faster rabbits, deer, and elk. About



MAP 1.1 The Ice Age and the Settling of the Americas

Some sixteen thousand years ago, a sheet of ice covered much of Europe and North America. Taking advantage of a broad bridge of land connecting Siberia and Alaska, hunting peoples from Asia migrated into North America, searching for large game animals, such as woolly mammoths, and ice-free habitats. By 10,000 B.C. the descendants of the migrant peoples had moved as far south as present-day Florida and central Mexico.

3000 B.C. some Native American peoples began to develop horticulture, most notably in the region near present-day Mexico. These inventive farmers planted beans, squashes, and cotton and learned how to breed maize, or Indian corn, as well as tomatoes, potatoes, and manioc—crops that would eventually enrich the food supply of the entire world. Over the centuries the Indian peoples bred maize into a much larger, extremely nutritious plant that was hardier and had more varieties and a higher yield per acre than wheat, barley, and rye, the staple cereals of Europe. They also learned to cultivate beans and squash and plant them together with corn, creating a mix of crops that provided a nutritious diet, preserved soil fertility, and produced intensive farming and high yields. The resulting agricultural surplus laid the economic foundation for populous and wealthy societies in Mexico, Peru, and the Mississippi River Valley.

The Mayas and the Aztecs

The flowering of civilization in Mesoamerica began among the Mayan peoples of the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico and the neighboring rain forests of Guatemala during the long Olmec era (900 B.C.–A.D. 300). The Mayas built large religious centers, urban communities with elaborate systems of water storage and irrigation. By A.D. 300 the Mayan city of Tikal had at least 20,000 inhabitants, mostly farmers who worked the nearby fields and whose labor was used to build huge stone temples. An elite class claiming descent from the gods ruled Mayan society, living in splendor on goods and taxes extracted from peasant families. Drawing on religious and artistic traditions that stretched back to the Olmec people, who had lived along the Gulf of Mexico around 700 B.C., skilled Mayan artisans decorated temples and palaces with art depicting warrior-gods and complex religious rituals. Mayan astronomers created a calendar that recorded historical events and predicted eclipses of the sun and the moon with remarkable accuracy. The Mayas also developed hieroglyphic writing to record royal lineages and noteworthy events, including wars. These skills in calculation and writing facilitated the movement of goods and ideas, allowing the creation of complex society.

Beginning around A.D. 800, Mayan civilization went into decline. Some evidence suggests that a two-century-long dry period caused a loss in population and an economic crisis that prompted overtaxed peasants to desert the temple cities and retreat into the countryside. By A.D. 900 many religious centers had been abandoned, but some Mayan city-states lasted until the Spanish invasion in the 1520s.

As the Mayan peoples flourished in the Yucatán region, a second major Mesoamerican civilization



Gold Piece from Peru

Skilled Inca artisans created gold jewelry and artifacts of striking beauty. Found in a tomb, this figurine may be a stylized image of the dead man, who was undoubtedly a noble of considerable status. Note the intricate detail on the man's headdress and garment.

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, Washington, DC.

developed in the central highlands of Mexico around the city of Teotihuacán, with its magnificent Pyramid of the Sun. At its zenith about A.D. 500, Teotihuacán had more than one hundred temples, about four thousand apartment buildings, and a population of at least 100,000. By A.D. 800 Teotihuacán had also declined, probably because of a long-term drop in rainfall and recurrent invasions by seminomadic warrior peoples. Eventually one of these peoples, the Aztecs, established an even more extensive empire.

The Aztecs entered the highlands of Mexico from the north and settled on an island in Lake Texcoco. There, in A.D. 1325, they began to build a new city, Tenochtitlán (present-day Mexico City). They learned the settled ways of the resident peoples, mastered their complex irrigation systems and written language, and established an elaborate culture with a hierarchical social order. Priests and warrior-nobles ruled over twenty clans of free Aztec commoners who farmed communally owned land, and the nobles used huge numbers of non-Aztec slaves and serfs to labor on their private estates. Artisans worked in stone, pottery, cloth, leather, and

**MAP 1.2 Native American Peoples, 1492**

Native Americans populated the entire Western Hemisphere at the time of Columbus's arrival, having learned how to live in many environments. They created diverse cultures that ranged from the centralized agriculture-based empires of the Mayas and the Aztecs to seminomadic tribes of hunter-gatherers. The sheer diversity among Indians—of culture, language, tribal identity—usually prevented united resistance to the European invaders.

especially obsidian (hard volcanic glass used to make sharp-edged weapons and tools).

The Aztecs remained an aggressive tribe and soon subjugated most of central Mexico. Their rulers demanded both economic and human tribute from scores of subject tribes, gruesomely sacrificing untold thousands of men and women to ensure agricultural fertility and the daily return of the sun. Aztec merchants created far-flung trading routes and imported

furs, gold, textiles, food, and obsidian. By A.D. 1500, Tenochtitlán had grown into a great metropolis with splendid palaces and temples and over 200,000 inhabitants, dazzling the first Spanish soldiers who saw it: "These great towns and pyramids and buildings arising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision." The Aztecs' wealth, strong institutions, and military power posed a formidable challenge to any adversary, at home or from afar.

The Indians of the North

The Indians who resided north of the Rio Grande were fewer in number and lived in less coercive societies than those to the south. In A.D. 1500 these Indians lived in dispersed communities of a few thousand people and spoke many different languages—no fewer than sixty-eight east of the Mississippi River (Map 1.2). Most were organized in self-governing tribes composed of **clans**—groups of related families that had a common identity and a real or legendary common ancestor. Tribal members lived in scattered settlements composed of various clans and led by a local chief, who, aided by the clan elders, conducted ceremonies and regulated personal life. For example, elders encouraged individuals to share food and other scarce goods, promoting an ethic of reciprocity rather than one of accumulation. “You are covetous, and neither generous nor kind,” the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia told acquisitive-minded French fur traders around 1600. “As for us, if we have a morsel of bread, we share it with our neighbor.” The individual ownership of land was virtually unknown in Indian culture; as a French missionary among the Iroquois noted, they “possess hardly anything except in common.” However, Indian elders granted families exclusive use-rights over certain planting grounds and hunting areas. Clan leaders also resolved personal feuds, disciplined individuals who violated customs, decided whether to go to war, and banned marriage between members of the same clan, a rule that helped prevent inbreeding. Nonetheless, the elders’ and chiefs’ power was far less than that of the Mayan and Aztec nobles because their kinship system of government was locally based and worked by consensus, not by coercion.

The Hopewell Culture. Over the centuries some Indian peoples exerted influence over their immediate neighbors through trade or conquest. The earliest expansive Indian cultures appeared in the eastern woodlands of North America as the inhabitants increased the food supply by domesticating plants and were thus able to settle in large villages. By A.D. 100 the vigorous Hopewell people in the area of present-day Ohio had spread their influence through trade from Wisconsin to Louisiana, importing obsidian from the Yellowstone region of the Rocky Mountains, copper from the Great Lakes, and pottery and marine shells from the Gulf of Mexico. They built large burial mounds and surrounded them with extensive circular, rectangular, or octagonal earthworks that in some cases still survive. The Hopewell people buried their dead with striking ornaments fashioned by their craftsmen: copper beaten into intricate artistic designs, crystals of quartz, mica cut into the shapes of serpents and human hands, and stone pipes carved to represent frogs, hawks, bears, and other animals—figurines evidently representing spiritually

powerful beings. For unknown reasons, the elaborate trading network of the Hopewell gradually collapsed around A.D. 400.

The Peoples of the Southwest. A second complex culture developed among the Pueblo peoples of the Southwest—the Hohokams, Mogollons, and Anasazis. By A.D. 600 Hohokam peoples in the highland region along the border of present-day Arizona and New Mexico were using irrigation to grow two crops a year, fashioning fine pottery with red-on-buff designs, and, under Mesoamerican influence, worshiping their gods on platform mounds; by A.D. 1000, they were living in elaborate multiroom stone structures (or pueblos). To the east, in the Mimbres Valley of New Mexico, the Mogollon peoples developed a distinctive black-on-white pottery. In the north of present-day New Mexico, the Anasazi culture developed around A.D. 900. The Anasazis were master architects, building residential-ceremonial villages in steep cliffs and a pueblo in Chaco Canyon that housed 1,000 people. Over four hundred miles of straight roads radiated out of Chaco Canyon, making it



Hopewell Artifact

The Wray figurine is one of the rare representations of a person from the Hopewell mound-building culture. It may depict a noble or a priest or, if the two circles below the chin are stylized breasts, may be a female fertility icon. Note the wolf mask atop the human head and the clawlike fingers of the right hand.
Ohio Historical Society.

a center for trade. However, the culture of the Anasazis, Mogollons, and Hohokams gradually collapsed after A.D. 1150 as long periods of drought and soil exhaustion disrupted maize production and prompted the abandonment of Chaco Canyon and other long-established communities. The descendants of these Pueblo peoples—including the Zunis and the Hopis—later built strong but smaller and more dispersed village societies.

Mississippian Civilization. The last large-scale culture to emerge north of the Rio Grande was the Mississippian civilization. Beginning about A.D. 800, the advanced farming technology of Mesoamerica spread into the Mississippi River Valley, perhaps carried by emigrants fleeing across the Gulf of Mexico from warfare among the Mayas in the Yucatán Peninsula. The Mississippian peoples planted new strains of maize and beans on fertile river bottomland, providing a protein-rich diet and creating an agricultural surplus. A robust culture based on small, fortified temple cities quickly emerged. By A.D. 1150 the largest city, Cahokia (near present-day St. Louis), had a population of 15,000 to 20,000 and more than one hundred temple mounds, one of them as large as the great Egyptian pyramids. As in Mesoamerica, the tribute paid by peasant cultivators supported a privileged class of nobles and priests who waged war against neighboring chiefdoms, patronized skilled artisans, and may have been worshiped as quasi-sacred beings related to the sun god.

However, by A.D. 1350 this six-hundred-year-old Mississippian civilization was in rapid decline, undermined by overpopulation, warfare over fertile bottomlands, and urban diseases such as tuberculosis. Nonetheless, the values and institutions of this culture endured for centuries east of the Mississippi River. When the Spanish adventurer Hernán de Soto invaded the region in the 1540s, he found the Apalachee and Timucua Indians living in permanent settlements, harvesting their fields twice a year, and fiercely resistant to his commands. “If you desire to see me, come where I am,” a paramount chief told de Soto, “neither for you, nor for any man, will I set back one foot.” A century and a half later French traders and priests who encountered the Natchez people in the area of present-day Mississippi found a society rigidly divided among hereditary chiefs, two groups of nobles and honored people, and a bottom class of peasants. Undoubtedly influenced by Mayan or Aztec rituals, the Natchez practiced human sacrifice; the death of a chief called for the sacrifice of his wives and the enlargement of a ceremonial mound to bury their remains (see Voices from Abroad, “Father le Petite: The Customs of the Natchez,” p. 13).

Other peoples in the region retained some Mesoamerican practices and also exhibited traces of the earlier mound-building Hopewell culture. Thus, the



Casa Grande Pot

The artistically and architecturally talented Mogollon and Anasazi peoples of Arizona and New Mexico took utilitarian objects—such as this ordinary pot—and decorated them with black-on-white designs. Their cultures flourished from 1000 to 1250, after which they slowly declined, probably because the climate became increasingly arid.

Courtesy, The Amerind Foundation, Inc., Dragoon, AZ / Photo by Robin Stancliff.

Choctaws regarded a mound in present-day Winston County, Mississippi, as *ishki chito*, the “great mother.” There, according to a Choctaw legend, “the Great Spirit created the first Choctaws, and through a hole or cave, they crawled forth into the light of day.” However, the Choctaws and others peoples of this region (such as the Creeks, Chickasaws, Cherokees, and Seminoles) lived in small and dispersed agricultural communities and thus escaped the devastating environmental damage and disease that destroyed the impressive city-states of the Mississippian peoples.

The Eastern Woodland Peoples. Although farming in Mesoamerica was the province of both sexes, among eastern Woodland Indians it was the work of women. Over the centuries North American Indian women became adept horticulturists, using flint hoes and more productive strains of corn, squash, and beans to reduce the dependence of their peoples on gathering and hunting (see New Technology, “Indian Women and Agriculture,” p. 14). Because of the importance of farming, a matrilineal inheritance system developed among many eastern Indian peoples, including the Five Nations of the Iroquois. Women cultivated the fields around semi-permanent settlements, passing the right to use them to their daughters. In these matrilineal societies, fathers stood outside the main lines of kinship, and the main responsibility for childrearing fell upon the mother and her brothers, who lived with her. The ritual lives of these

Father le Petite

The Customs of the Natchez

Beliefs and institutions from the earlier Mississippian culture (A.D. 1000–1450) lasted for centuries among the Natchez, who lived in present-day Mississippi. This letter was written around 1730 by Father le Petite, one of the hundreds of Jesuits who lived among the Indians in the French colonies of Louisiana and Canada and wrote detailed accounts of what they saw. Father le Petite accurately describes many Indian customs but misinterprets the rules governing the succession of the chief, which simply followed the normal practice of descent and inheritance in a matrilineal society.

My Reverend Father, The peace of Our Lord.

This Nation of Savages inhabits one of the most beautiful and fertile countries in the World, and is the only one on this continent which appears to have any regular worship. Their Religion in certain points is very similar to that of the ancient Romans. They have a Temple filled with Idols, which are different figures of men and of animals, and for which they have the most profound veneration. Their Temple in shape resembles an earthen oven, a hundred feet in circumference. They enter it by a little door about four feet high, and not more than three in breadth. Above on the outside are three figures of eagles made of wood, and painted red, yellow, and white. Before the door is a kind of shed with folding-doors, where the Guardian of the Temple is

lodged; all around it runs a circle of palisades, on which are seen exposed the skulls of all the heads which their Warriors had brought back from the battles in which they had been engaged with the enemies of their Nation. . . .

The Sun is the principal object of veneration to these people; as they cannot conceive of anything which can be above this heavenly body, nothing else appears to them more worthy of their homage. It is for the same reason that the great Chief of this Nation, who knows nothing on the earth more dignified than himself, takes the title of brother of the Sun, and the credulity of the people maintains him in the despotic authority which he claims. To enable them better to converse together, they raise a mound of artificial soil, on which they build his cabin, which is of the same construction as the Temple.

The old men prescribe the Laws for the rest of the people, and one of their principles is . . . the immortality of the soul, and when they leave this world they go, they say, to live in another, there to be recompensed or punished.

In former times the Nation of the *Natchez* was very large. It counted sixty Villages and eight hundred Suns or Princes; now it is reduced to six little Villages and eleven Suns. [Its] Government is hereditary; it is not, however, the son of the reigning Chief who succeeds his father, but the son of his sister, or the first Princess of the blood. This policy is founded on the knowledge they have of the licentiousness of their women. They are not sure, they say, that the children of the chief's wife may be of the blood Royal, whereas the son of the sister of the great Chief must be, at least on the side of the mother.

Source: *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Murrow Brothers, 1900), 68:121–35.

farming peoples focused on religious ceremonies related to the agricultural cycle, such as the Iroquois green corn and strawberry festivals. Indian peoples ate better because of women's labor and long-term advances in their farming practices, but they enjoyed few material comforts, and their populations grew slowly.

In A.D. 1500 most Indians north of the Rio Grande had resided on the same lands for generations, but the elaborate civilizations and strong city-states that had once flourished in the Southwest and in the great river valleys in the heart of the continent had vanished.

Consequently, when the European adventurers, traders, and settlers came ashore from the Atlantic, there were no great Indian empires or religious centers that could lead a campaign of military and spiritual resistance. "When you command, all the French obey and go to war," the Chippewa chief Chigabe told a European general, but "I shall not be heeded and obeyed by my nation." Because household and lineage were the basis of his society, Chigabe explained, "I cannot answer except for myself and for those immediately allied to me."

Indian Women and Agriculture

Corn was the dietary staple of most Native Americans, and its cultivation shaped their vision of the natural world. The Agawam Indians of Massachusetts began their year with the month of Squannikesas, a word that meant "when they set Indian corn," and subsequent months had names that referred to the weeding, hillng, and ripening of corn. To appease the spirit forces in nature and ensure a bountiful harvest, the Seneca Indians of New York held a corn-planting ceremony. They asked the Thunderers, "our grandfathers," to water their crops and beseeched the sun, "our older brother," not to burn them.

Among the eastern Woodland tribes, growing corn was women's work. The French priest Gabriel Sagard spoke of Huron women doing "more work than the men.... They have the care of the household, of sowing and gathering corn, grinding flour, ... and providing the necessary wood." Indian women prepared the ground for planting with wooden hoes tipped with bone, flint, or clamshells. According to a Dutch traveler, they made "heaps like molehills, each about two and a half feet from the others" and planted "in each heap five

or six grains." As the tall slender plants appeared, the women piled on more dirt to support the roots. They also "put in each hill three or four Brazilian [kidney] beans. When they grow up, they interlace with the corn, which reaches to a height of from five to six feet; and they keep the ground free of weeds."

The planting of corn and beans together represented a major technological advance, dramatically increasing total yields and human nutrition. The beans fixed nitrogen in the soil, preserving fertility, and conserved moisture, preventing erosion. Beans and corn provided a diet rich in vegetable proteins. By intensively cultivating two acres, an Indian woman typically harvested sixty bushels of shelled corn—half the calories required by five persons for a year.

This economic contribution enhanced the political influence of women in some tribes, especially those in which names and inheritance rights passed through women (matrilinealism). Thus, among the matrilineal Iroquois, women chose the clan leaders. To preserve their status, women jealously guarded their productive role. A Quaker missionary reported as late as 1809 that "if a man took hold of a hoe to use it, the Women would get down his gun by way of derision & laugh and say such a Warrior is a timid woman."

In seventeenth-century America, English farmers appropriated Indian corn technology and made it part of their own culture. Now Protestant ministers (as well as Indian shamans) prayed for a bountiful harvest of corn. After clearing their fields of tree stumps, English farmers

Traditional European Society in 1450

In A.D. 1450 few observers would have predicted that the European peoples would become the overlords of the Western Hemisphere. A thousand years after the fall of the magnificent Roman empire, Europe had become a backward society, devastated around 1350 by a vicious epidemic from the subcontinent of India—the Black Death—that killed one-third of its peoples. Other areas of the world were much more economically advanced and were expanding their seaborne trade. Indeed, the ruling dynasty in China had recently dispatched a major commercial fleet to the eastern coast of Africa.

The Peasantry

There were only a few large cities in Western Europe before A.D. 1450—only Paris, London, and Naples had

100,000 residents and thus equaled the size of Teotihuacán at its zenith. More than 90 percent of the European population consisted of **peasants** living in small rural communities. Peasant families usually owned or leased a small dwelling in the village center and had the right to farm strips of land in the surrounding fields. The fields were "open"—not divided by fences or hedges—making cooperative farming a necessity. The village community decided which crops would be grown, and every family followed its dictates. Because there were few merchants or good roads to carry goods to distant markets, most families exchanged surplus grain and meat with their neighbors or bartered their farm products for the services of local millers, weavers, and blacksmiths. Most peasants yearned to live in a **yeoman** family—a household that was under no obligation to a landlord and owned enough land to support its members in comfort—but relatively few achieved that goal.

plowed furrows at three-foot intervals from north to south. Then they cut east-west furrows, heaping up the soil into Indian-style cornhills at the intersecting points. English planting methods were less labor-intensive than Indian techniques and far less productive, averaging from ten to fifteen bushels per acre, not thirty.

Equally significant, among European settlers men—not women—planted, tended, and harvested the crop. In combination with patrilineal naming and inheritance practices, the dominance of men in agriculture confined colonial women to a subordinate role in economic and political life.

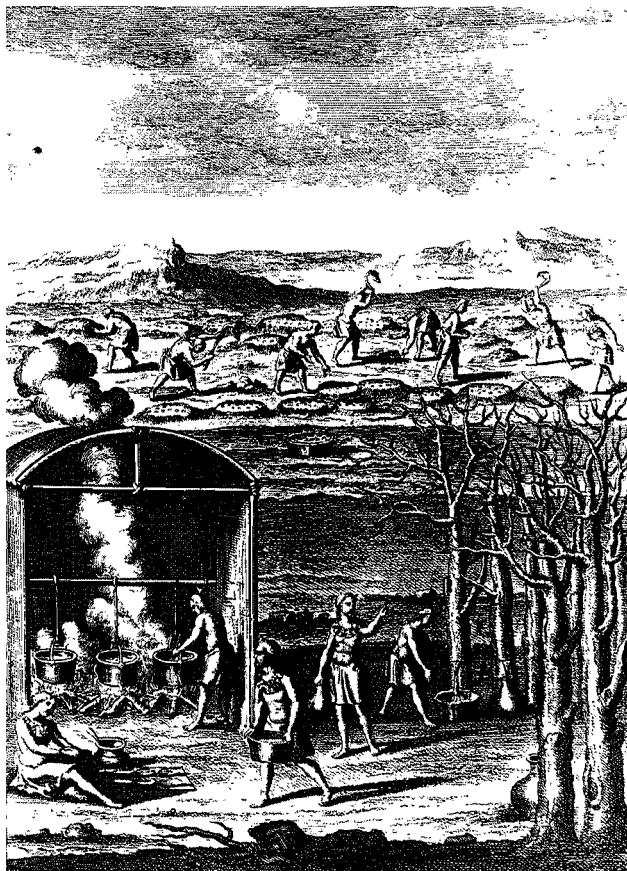
Among Europeans as well as Indians, corn soon became the premier crop, and with good reason. As a Welsh migrant to Pennsylvania noted, corn “produced more increase than any other Graine whatsoever.” Pigs and chickens ate its kernels, and cows munched its stalks and leaves. Ground into flour and made into bread, cakes, or porridge, corn became the dietary staple of

poor people in the northern English colonies and of white tenant farmers and enslaved blacks in the South and the West Indies.

Iroquois Women at Work, 1724

As this European engraving suggests, Iroquois women took the major responsibility for growing food crops. The women in the background are hoeing the soil into small hillocks, in which they are planting corn and beans. Most of the other workers are tapping sugar maples and boiling the sweet sap to create maple syrup. However, the woman at the left is probably grinding corn into flour and, by adding water, making flat patties for baking.

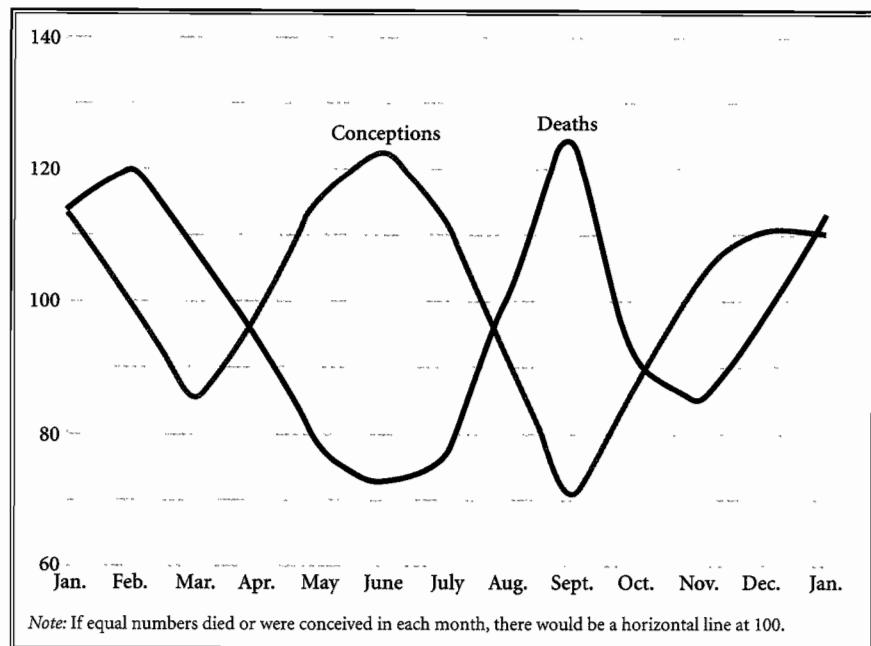
Newberry Library.



The Seasonal Cycle. As among the Native Americans, many aspects of European peasant life followed a seasonal pattern (Figure 1.1). The agricultural year began in March or April, when the ground thawed and dried and the villagers began the exhausting work of spring plowing and the planting of wheat, rye, and oats. During these busy months men sheared the thick winter wool of their sheep, which the women washed and spun into yarn. Peasants cut the first crop of hay in June and stored it as winter fodder for their livestock. In the summer, life became more relaxed, and families mended their fences or repaired their barns. August and September often were marked by grief as infants and old people succumbed to epidemics of fly-borne dysentery. Fall brought the strenuous harvest time, followed by solemn feasts of thanksgiving and riotous bouts of merrymaking. As winter approached, peasants slaughtered excess livestock and salted or smoked the meat. During the cold months peasants

completed the tasks of threshing grain and weaving textiles and had time to visit friends and relatives in nearby villages. Just before the farming cycle began again in the spring, rural residents held carnivals to celebrate with drink and dance the end of the long winter night.

Many rural people died in January and February, victims of viral diseases and the cold. More mysteriously, in European villages (and later in rural British America), the greatest numbers of babies were born in February and March, with a smaller peak in September and October. The precise causes of this pattern are unknown. Religious practices, such as the abstention from sexual intercourse by devout Christians during Lent, might have increased the number of conceptions in the months following the Easter holy day. Even more likely, seasonal fluctuations in female work patterns or the food supply might have altered a woman's ability to carry a child to full term. One thing is certain. This



pattern of births does not exist in modern urban societies, so it must have been a reflection of the rigors of the traditional agriculture cycle.

The Peasant's Lot. For most peasants survival required unremitting labor. Horses and oxen strained to break the soil with primitive wooden plows, while workers harvested hay, wheat, rye, and barley with hand sickles. Because of the lack of high-quality seeds, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides, output was pitifully small—less than one-tenth of present-day yields. The margin of existence was thin, corroding family relations. Malnourished mothers fed their babies sparingly, calling them “greedy and gluttonous,” and many newborn girls were “helped to die” so that their older brothers would have enough to eat. About half of all peasant children died before the age of twenty-one. Violence—assault, murder, rape—was much more prevalent than in most modern industrialized societies, and hunger and disease were constant companions. “I have seen the latest epoch of misery,” a French doctor reported as famine and plague struck. “The inhabitants . . . lie down in a meadow to eat grass, and share the food of wild beasts.”

Often destitute, usually exploited and dominated by landlords and aristocrats, many peasants simply accepted their condition, but others did not. It would be the deprived rural classes of Britain, Spain, and Germany, hoping for a better life for themselves and their children, who would supply the majority of white migrants to the Western Hemisphere.

FIGURE 1.1 The Yearly Rhythm of Rural Life and Death

The annual cycle of nature profoundly affected life in the traditional agricultural world. The death rate soared by 20 percent in February and September. Summer was the healthiest season, with the fewest deaths and the greatest number of successful conceptions (as measured by births nine months later).

Hierarchy and Authority

In the traditional European social order, as among the Aztec and Mayan peoples, authority came from above. Kings and princes owned vast tracts of land, conscripted men for military service, and lived in splendor off the labor of the peasantry. Yet rulers were far from supreme, given the power of the nobles, each of whom also owned large estates and controlled hundreds of peasant families. Collectively, these noblemen had the power to challenge royal authority. They had their own legislative institutions, such as the French *parlements* and the English House of Lords, and enjoyed special privileges, such as the right to a trial before a jury of other noblemen. However, after 1450 kings began to undermine the power of the nobility and to create more centralized states, laying the administrative basis for overseas expansion.

Just as kings and nobles ruled the state, so the men in peasant families ruled their women and children. The man was the head of the house, his power justified by the teachings of the Christian Church. As one English clergyman put it, “The woman is a weak creature not embued with like strength and constancy of mind”; law and custom consequently “subjected her to the power of man.” On marriage, an English woman assumed her husband’s surname and was required (under the threat of legally sanctioned physical “correction”) to submit to his orders. Moreover, she surrendered to her husband the legal right to all her property; on his death she received a **dower**, usually the use during her lifetime of one-third of the family’s land and goods.

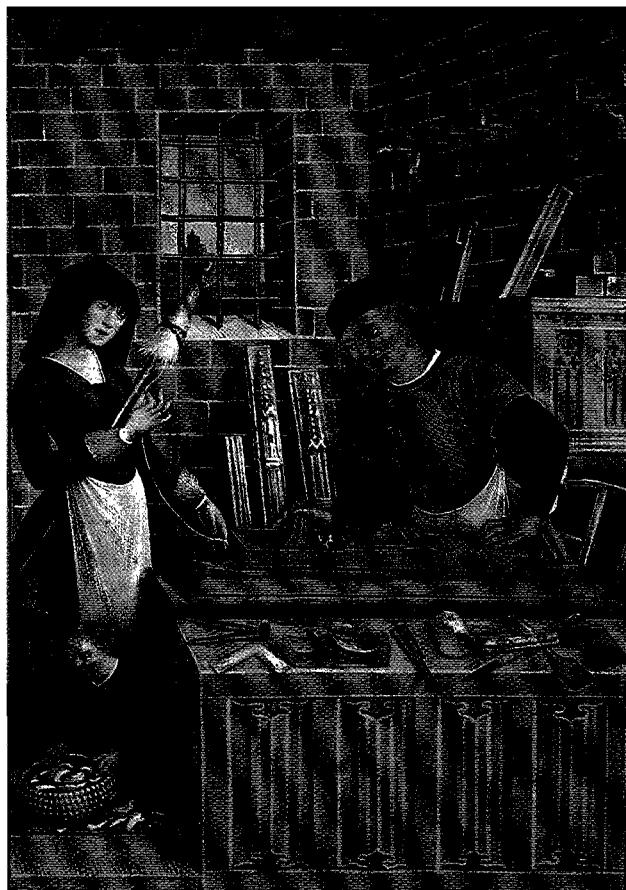
A father controlled the lives of his children with equal authority, demanding that they work for him until their middle or late twenties. Then a landowning peasant would try to provide land to sons and dowries to daughters and choose marriage partners of appropriate wealth and status for them. In many regions fathers bestowed most of the land on the eldest son, an inheritance practice known as “primogeniture,” which forced many younger children to join the ranks of the roaming poor. In such a society few men—and even fewer women—had much personal freedom or individual identity.

Hierarchy and authority prevailed in traditional European society both because of the power of established institutions and because, in a violent and unpredictable world, they offered ordinary people a measure of security. These values of order and security, which migrants carried with them to America, would shape the character of family life and the social order there well into the eighteenth century.

The Power of Religion

The Roman Catholic Church served as one of the great unifying forces in Western European society. By A.D. 1000 Christian priests had converted most of pagan Europe. The pope, as head of the Catholic Church, directed a vast hierarchy of cardinals, bishops, and priests. Latin, the great language of classical scholarship, was preserved by Catholic institutions, and Christian dogma provided a common understanding of God, the world, and human history. Equally important, the Church provided another bulwark of authority and discipline in society. Every village had a church, and holy shrines dotted the byways of Europe.

Christian doctrine penetrated deeply into the everyday lives of peasants. Over the centuries the Church had devised a religious calendar that followed the agricultural cycle and transformed pagan festivals into Christian holy days. The pagans of Europe, like many of the Indians of North America, were animists who believed that the entire natural world contained unpredictable spiritual forces that had to be paid ritual honor. Conversely, Christian priests taught that spiritual power came from outside nature, from a great God located above the earth who had sent his divine son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save humanity from its sins. They turned the winter solstice, which for pagans marked the return of the sun, into the feast of Christmas, to mark the coming of the Savior. Likewise the feast of Easter, celebrating Christ’s resurrection from the dead, imparted a new meaning to the pagans’ spring fertility festivals. To avert famine and plague, Christian peasants did not make ritual offerings to nature but



Artisan Family

Work was slow and output was limited in the preindustrial world, and survival required the efforts of all family members. Here a fifteenth-century French woodworker planes a panel of wood while his wife twists flax fibers into linen yarn for the family's clothes and their son fashions a basket out of reeds.

Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.

turned to priests for spiritual guidance and offered prayers to Christ and the saints.

The Church also taught that Satan, a lesser and evil supernatural being, constantly challenged God by tempting people into sin and wrongdoing. If prophets spread unusual doctrines, or **heresies**, they were surely the tools of Satan. If a devout Christian fell mysteriously ill, the sickness might be the result of an evil spell cast by a witch in league with Satan. Combating other religions and suppressing false doctrines among Christians became an obligation of rulers and a principal task of the new orders of Christian knights. In the centuries after the death in A.D. 632 of the prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, the newly converted peoples of the Mediterranean used force and persuasion to spread the Islamic faith and Arab civilization into sub-Saharan Africa, India, and Indonesia and deep into Spain and the Balkan region of eastern Europe. Between 1096 and 1291 successive armies of Christians, led by European kings and nobles,

embarked on a series of Crusades to halt the advance of Islam and expel Arab Muslims from the Holy Land in the eastern Mediterranean, where Jesus had lived. Within Europe, Crusader armies crushed heretical Christian sects, such as the Albigensians of southern France.

The crusaders temporarily gained control of much of Palestine, but the impact of the Crusades on Europe was more profound. Religious warfare reinforced and intensified its Christian identity, resulting in renewed persecution of Jews and their expulsion from many European countries. The Crusades also broadened the intellectual and economic horizons of the privileged classes of Western Europe, bringing them into contact with the Mediterranean region of North Africa and its Arabic-speaking peoples. Arab Muslims led the world in scholarship, and their language and merchants

dominated the trade routes that stretched from Mongolia to Constantinople and from the East Indies to the Mediterranean.

Europe Encounters Africa and the Americas, 1450–1550

Around A.D. 1400 Europeans shook off the lethargy of their traditional agricultural society with a major revival of learning—the Renaissance (from the French word for “rebirth”). Drawing inspiration from classical Greek and Roman (rather than Christian) sources, Renaissance intellectuals were optimistic in their view of human



Christ's Crucifixion

This graphic portrayal by the German painter Grünewald of Christ's death on the cross and subsequent burial reminded believers not only of Christ's sacrifice but also of the ever-present prospect of their own death. The panel to the left depicts the martyr St. Sebastian, killed by dozens of arrows, while that to the right probably portrays the abbot of the monastery in Isenheim, Germany, that commissioned the altarpiece.

Colmar, Musée Unterlinden, Colmar-Giraudon/Art Resource.

nature and celebrated individual potential. They saw themselves not as prisoners of blind fate or victims of the forces of nature but as many-sided individuals with the capacity to change the world. Inspired by new knowledge and a new optimism, the rulers of Portugal and Spain commissioned Italian navigators to find new trade routes to India and China. These maritime adventurers soon brought Europeans into direct contact with the peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, beginning a new era in world history.

The Renaissance

Stimulated by the wealth and learning of the Arab world, first Italy and then the countries of northern Europe experienced the rebirth of learning and cultural life now



Astronomers at Istanbul, 1581

Arab and Turkish scholars transmitted ancient texts and learning to Europeans during the Middle Ages and provided much of the geographical and astronomical knowledge used by European explorers during the sixteenth century, the great Age of Discovery. Ergun Cagutay, Istanbul.

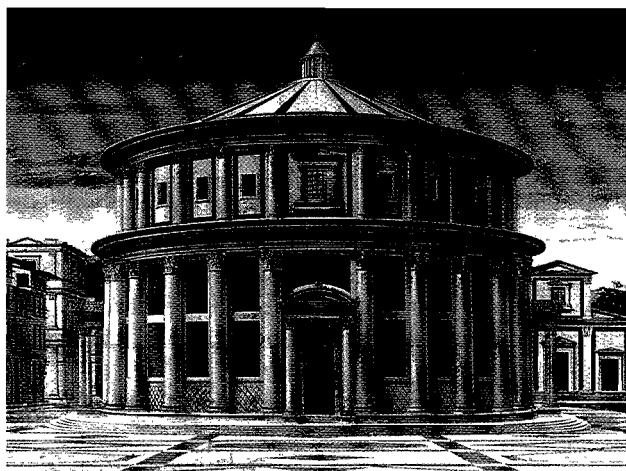
known as the Renaissance. Arab traders had access to the fabulous treasures of the East, such as silks and spices, and Arab societies had acquired magnetic compasses, water-powered mills, and mechanical clocks. In great cultural centers such as Alexandria and Cairo in Egypt, Arab scholars carried on the legacy of Christian Byzantine civilization, which had preserved the great achievements of the Greeks and Romans in religion, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and geography. Through Arab learning, the peoples of Europe reacquainted themselves with their own classical heritage.

Innovations in Economics, Art, and Politics. The Renaissance had the most profound impact on the upper classes. Merchants from the Italian city-states of Venice, Genoa, and Pisa dispatched ships to Alexandria, Beirut, and other eastern Mediterranean ports, where they purchased goods from China, India, Persia, and Arabia and sold them throughout Europe. The enormous profits from this commerce created a new class of merchants, bankers, and textile manufacturers who conducted trade, lent vast sums of money, and spurred technological innovation in silk and wool production. This moneyed elite ruled the republican city-states of Italy and created the concept of **civic humanism**, an ideology that celebrated public virtue and service to the state and would profoundly influence European and American conceptions of government.

In addition to new civic ideals, perhaps no other age in European history has produced such a flowering of artistic genius. Michelangelo, Andrea Palladio, and Filippo Brunelleschi designed and built great architectural masterpieces, while Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael produced magnificent religious paintings, creating styles and setting standards that have endured into the modern era.

This creative energy inspired Renaissance rulers. In *The Prince* (1513), Niccolò Machiavelli provided unsentimental advice on how monarchs could increase their political power. The kings of Western Europe followed his advice, creating royal law courts and bureaucracies to reduce the power of the landed classes and seeking alliances with merchants and urban artisans. Monarchs allowed merchants to trade throughout their realms and granted privileges to artisan guilds, encouraging both domestic manufacturing and foreign trade. In return, these rulers extracted taxes from towns and loans from merchants to support their armies and officials. This alliance of monarchs, merchants, and royal bureaucrats (which eventually became known as **mercantilism**) challenged the power of the agrarian nobility, while the increasing wealth of monarchical nation-states such as Spain and Portugal propelled Europe into its first age of overseas expansion.

Maritime Expansion. Under the direction of Prince Henry (1394–1460), Portugal led the great surge of



Renaissance Architecture

In the painting The Ideal City, the Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca uses columned buildings to recall the classical world of Greece and Rome and emphasizes symmetrical forms to create a world of ordered beauty. Scala/Art Resource.

maritime commercial expansion. Henry was at once a Christian warrior and a Renaissance humanist. As a general of the Crusading Order of Christ, he had fought the Muslims in North Africa, an experience that reinforced his desire to extend the bounds of Christendom—and Portuguese power. As a humanist, Henry patronized Renaissance thinkers; as an explorer, he relied on Arab and Italian geographers for the latest knowledge about the shape and size of the continents. Imbued with the spirit of the Renaissance, he tried to fulfill the mission assigned to him by an astrologer: “to engage in great and noble conquests and to attempt the discovery of things hidden from other men.”

Because Arab and Italian merchants dominated trade in the Mediterranean, Henry sought an alternative oceanic route to the wealth of Asia. In the 1420s he established a center for exploration and ocean mapping near Lisbon and sent newly developed, strongly constructed three-masted ships (caravels) to sail the African coast. His seamen soon discovered and settled three sets of islands—the Madeiras, Canaries, and the Azores. By 1435 Portuguese sea captains were roaming the coast of West Africa, seeking ivory and gold in exchange for salt, wine, and fish. By the 1440s they were trading in humans as well, the first Europeans to engage in the long-established African slave trade.

West African Society and Slavery

Vast and diverse, West Africa stretches along the coast from present-day Senegal to Angola. In the 1400s tropical rain forest covered much of the coast, but a series of great rivers—the Senegal, Gambia, Volta, Niger, and

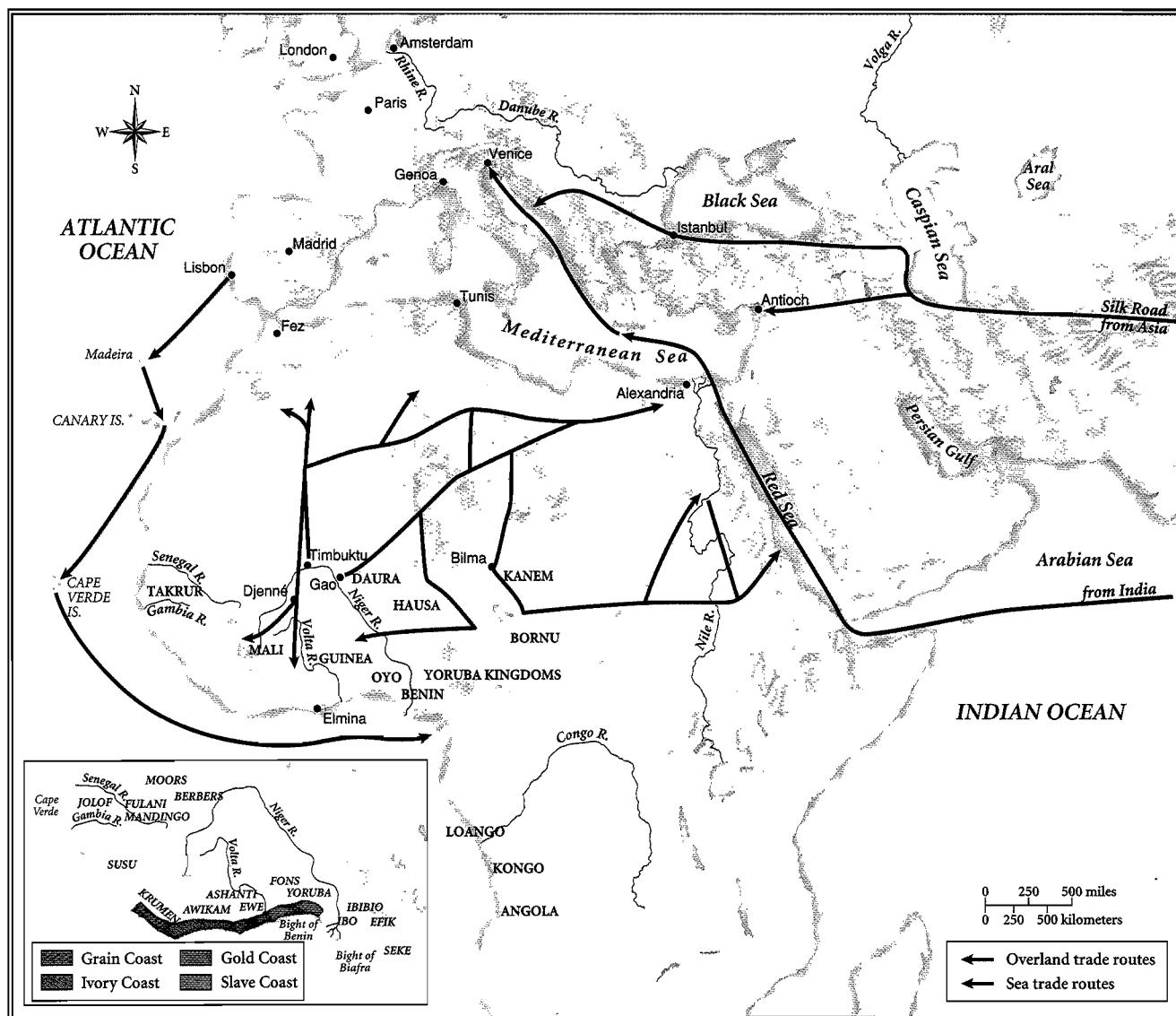
Congo—provided relatively easy access to the woodlands, plains, and savanna of the interior (Map 1.3).

West African Life. Most of the people of West Africa farmed modest plots and lived in extended families in small villages. Normally, men cleared the land and women planted and harvested the crops. On the plains of the savanna, millet, cotton, and livestock were the primary products, while the forest peoples grew yams and harvested oil-rich palm nuts. Forest dwellers exchanged palm oil and kola nuts, a mild stimulant, for the textiles and leather goods produced by savanna dwellers. Similarly, salt produced along the seacoast was traded for iron or gold mined in the hills of the interior.

West Africans spoke many different languages and lived in hundreds of distinct cultural and political groups. A majority of the people resided in hierarchical, socially stratified societies ruled by princes. Other West Africans dwelled in stateless societies organized by household and lineage (much like those of the Woodland Indians of eastern North America). Most peoples had secret societies, such as the Poro for men and the Sande for women, that united people from different lineages and clans and exercised political influence by checking the powers of rulers in princely states. These societies provided sexual education for the young, conducted adult initiation ceremonies, and, by shaming individuals and officials, enforced codes of public conduct and private morality.

Spiritual beliefs varied greatly. Although some West Africans had been converted by Arab missionaries from the north to the Muslim faith and believed in a single god, most recognized a variety of deities—ranging from a remote creator-god who seldom interfered in human affairs to numerous animistic spirits that lived in the earth, animals, and plants. Africans viewed their ancestors with great respect, believing that they inhabited a spiritual world from which they could intercede on behalf of their descendants. Royal families in particular paid elaborate homage to their ancestors, hoping to give themselves an aura of divinity.

At first European traders had a positive impact on life in West Africa by introducing new plants and animals. Portuguese merchants carried coconuts from East Africa, oranges and lemons from the Mediterranean, pigs from Western Europe, and (after 1500) maize, manioc, and tomatoes from the Americas. Portuguese merchants also expanded existing African trade networks, stimulating the economy. From small, fortified trading posts on the coast, iron bars and metal products joined kola nuts and salt moving inland; in return, grain, gold, ivory, pepper, cotton textiles, and, eventually, slaves flowed down the rivers to oceangoing ships. Because of disease, the inland trade remained in the hands of Africans; Europeans who lived in the interior of West Africa were quickly



MAP 1.3 West Africa and the Mediterranean in the Fifteenth Century

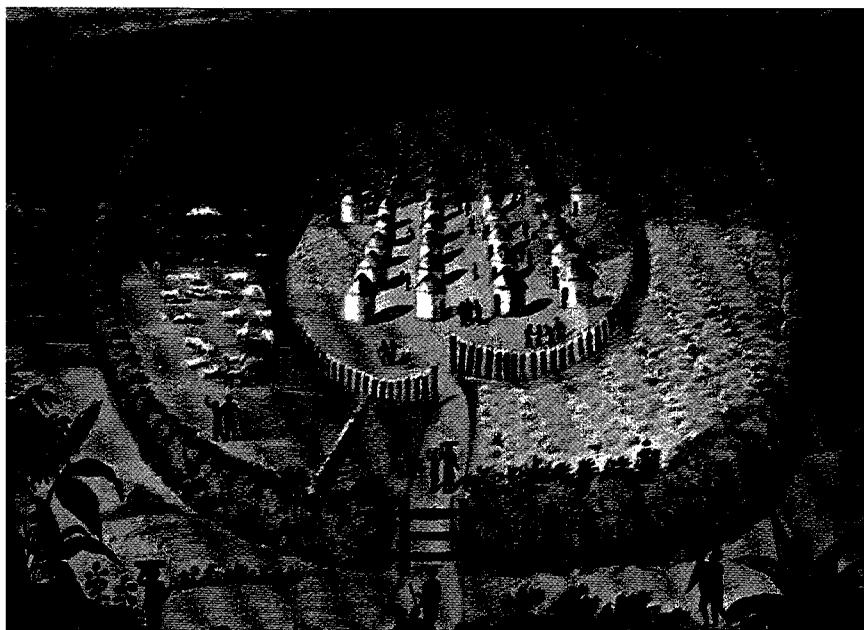
Trade routes across the Sahara Desert had long connected West Africa with the Mediterranean region. Gold, ivory, and slaves moved northward; fine textiles, spices, and the Muslim faith traveled to the south. Beginning in the 1430s, the Portuguese opened up a maritime trade with the coastal regions of West Africa, which were home to many peoples and dozens of large and small states.

stricken by yellow fever, malaria, and dysentery, and their death rate often reached 50 percent a year.

The Slave Trade. Europeans soon joined in the trade in humans. Unfree status had existed for many centuries in West Africa. Some people were held in bondage as security for debts; others had been sold into servitude by their kin, often in exchange for food in times of famine; still others were war captives. Although treated as property and exploited as agricultural laborers, slaves usually were considered members of the society that had enslaved them and sometimes were treated as kin. Most retained the right to marry, and their children were

often free. A small proportion of unfree West Africans were **trade slaves**, mostly war captives and criminals sold from one kingdom to another or carried overland in caravans by Arab traders to the Mediterranean region. Thus, the first Portuguese in Senegambia found that the Wolof king there had created a slave-trading society:

[The king] supports himself by raids which result in many slaves from his own as well as neighboring countries. He employs these slaves in cultivating the land allotted to him; but he also sells many to the Azanagli [Arab]



Fulani Village in West Africa

Around 1550 the Fulani people conquered the lands to the south of the Senegal River. To protect themselves from subject peoples and neighboring tribes, the Fulani constructed fortified villages, such as the one depicted here. Previously the Fulani had been nomadic herders and, as the enclosed pasture shows, continued to keep livestock. Note the cylindrical houses of mud brick, surmounted by thatched roofs.

Frederic Shoberl, ed., *The World in Miniature*, 1821.

For more help analyzing this image, see the [ONLINE STUDY GUIDE](#) at bedfordstmartins.com/henretta.

merchants in return for horses and other goods, and also to the Christians, since they have begun to trade with these blacks.

Portuguese traders established “forts” at small port cities—Gorée, Elmina, Mpinda, and Loango—where they bought slaves from African princes and warlords. Initially they carried a few thousand African slaves each year to sugar plantations in Madeira and the Canary Islands and also to Lisbon, which soon had a black population of 9,000, and Seville in Spain, home to 6,000 slaves in 1550. From this small beginning the maritime slave trade expanded enormously, especially after 1550 when Europeans set up sugar plantations in Brazil and the West Indies. By 1700 slave traders were carrying hundreds of thousands of slaves to toil and die on American plantations.

Europe Reaches the Americas

As they traded with Africans, Portuguese adventurers continued to look for a direct ocean route to Asia. In 1488 Bartholomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of Africa, and ten years later Vasco da Gama reached India. Although the Arab, Indian, and Jewish merchants who controlled the trade along India’s Malabar Coast tried to exclude him, da Gama acquired a highly profitable cargo of cinnamon and pepper—spices that were especially valuable because they could be used to flavor and preserve meat. To capture the trade in spices and Indian textiles for Portugal, da Gama returned to India in 1502 with twenty-one fighting vessels, which outmaneuvered and outgunned the Arab fleets. Soon the Portuguese government set up fortified trading posts for its merchants at key points around the Indian Ocean and

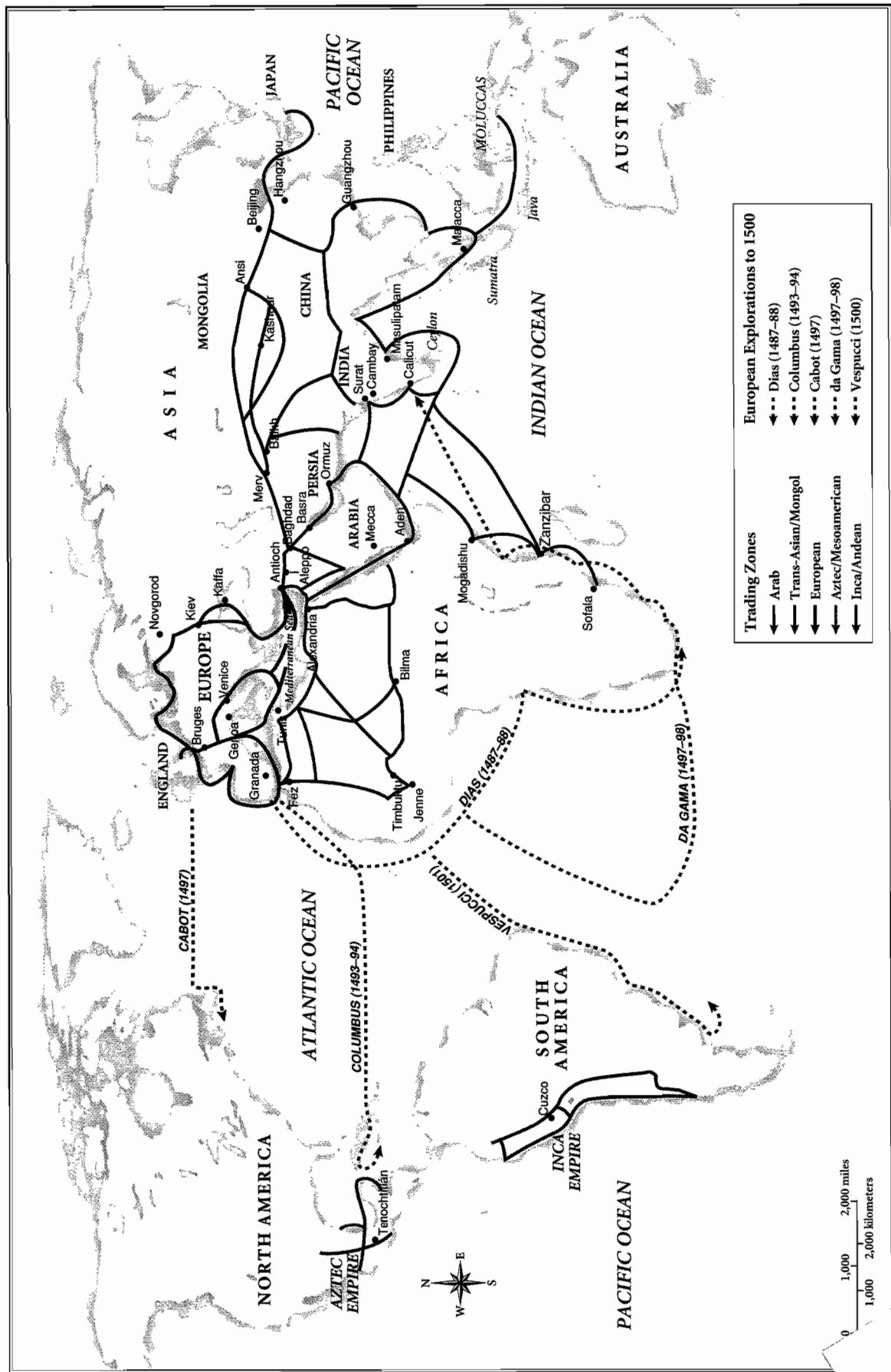
opened trade routes from Africa to Indonesia and up the coast of Asia to China and Japan. In a momentous transition, Portuguese replaced Arabs as the leaders in world commerce and the trade in African slaves.

Spain quickly followed Portugal’s example. As Renaissance rulers, King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabel of Castile saw national unity and commerce as the keys to power and prosperity. Married in their teens in an arranged match, the young rulers (r. 1474–1516) combined their kingdoms and completed the centuries-long campaign known as the *reconquista* to oust the Muslims from their realm. In 1492 their armies reconquered Granada, the last outpost of Islam in Western Europe. Continuing their effort to use the Catholic religion to build a sense of “Spanishness,” Ferdinand and Isabel launched a brutal Inquisition against suspected Christian heretics and expelled or forcibly converted thousands of Jews. Simultaneously they sought new opportunities for trade and empire (Map 1.4).

Because Portugal controlled the southern, or African, approach to Asia, Isabel and Ferdinand listened with interest to proposals for an alternative, western route to

► MAP 1.4 The Eurasian Trade System and European Maritime Ventures, 1500

For centuries the Mediterranean port cities of Antioch and Alexandria served as the western termini of the great Eurasian trading routes—the silk route from China and the spice trade from India and Indonesia. Between 1480 and 1550, European explorers subsidized by the monarchs and merchants of Portugal, Spain, and Holland opened new maritime connections to Africa, India, and the Americas, challenging the primacy of the Arab-dominated routes through the lands and waterways of the eastern Mediterranean. (To trace changes in trade and empires over time, see also Map 2.2 on p. 46 and Map 5.1 on p. 134.)



the riches of the East. The main advocate for such a route was Christopher Columbus, a devout Catholic and a struggling Genoese sea captain who was determined to become rich and to convert the peoples of Asia to Christianity. Misinterpreting the findings of Italian geographers, Columbus believed that the Atlantic Ocean, long feared by Arab sailors as a ten-thousand-mile-wide “green sea of darkness,” was little more than a narrow channel of water separating Europe from Asia. Dubious at first about Columbus’s theory, Ferdinand and Isabel finally agreed to arrange financial backing from Spanish merchants. They charged Columbus with the task of discovering a new trade route to China and, in an expression of the crusading mentality of the *reconquista*, of carrying Christianity to the peoples of Asia.

Columbus set sail with three small ships in August 1492. Six weeks later, after a perilous voyage of three thousand miles, he finally found land, disembarking on October 12, 1492, on one of the islands of the present-day Bahamas. Although surprised by the rude living conditions of the natives, Columbus expected them to “easily be made Christians, for it appeared to me that they had no religion.” With ceremony and solemnity, he bestowed the names of the Spanish royal family and Catholic holy days on the islands, intending thereby to claim them for Spain and for Christendom.

Believing he had reached Asia—“the Indies,” in fifteenth-century parlance—Columbus called the native inhabitants Indians and the islands the West Indies. He then explored the neighboring Caribbean islands, demanding gold from the local Taino, Arawak, and Carib peoples. Buoyed by the natives’ stories of rivers of gold lying “to the west,” Columbus left forty men on the island of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and returned triumphantly to Spain, taking several Tainos to display to Isabella and Ferdinand.

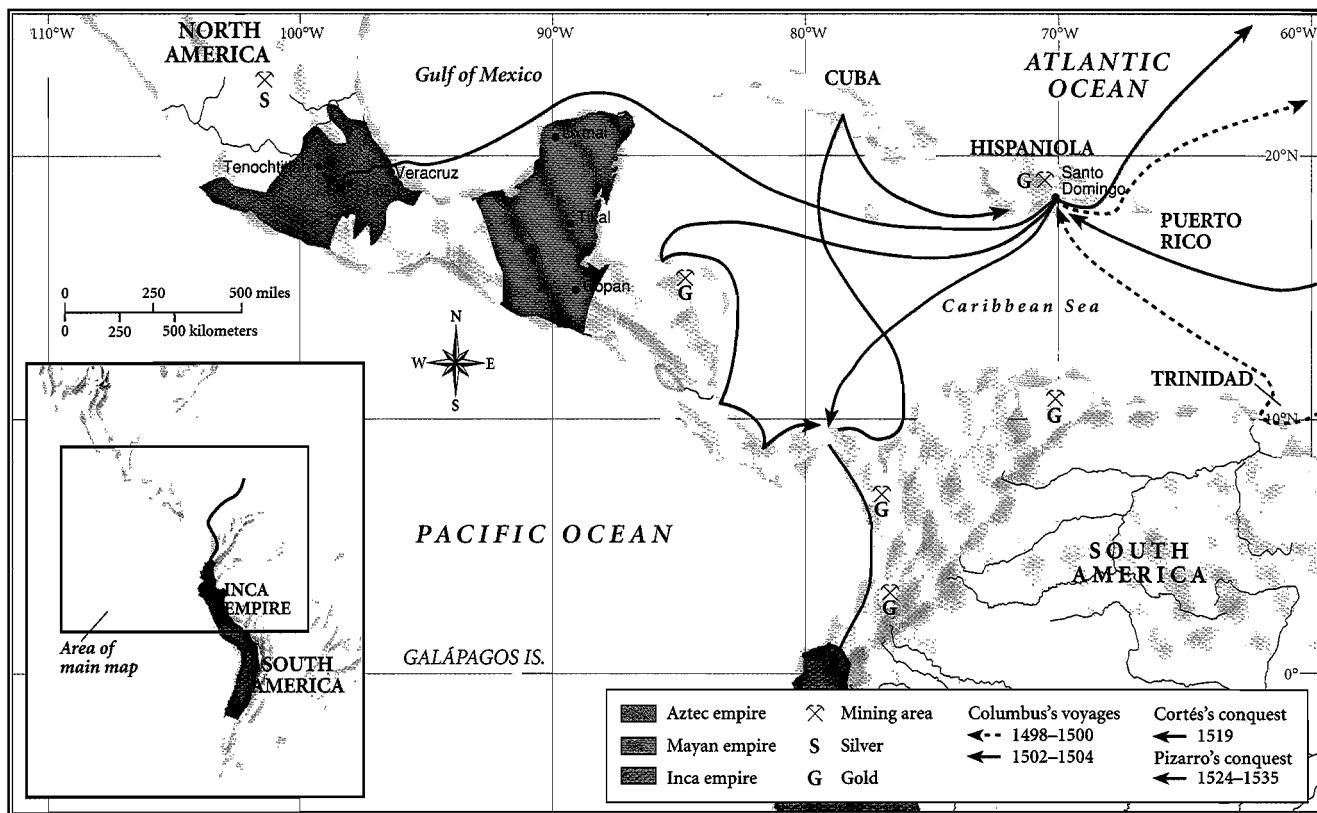
Although Columbus brought back no gold, the Spanish monarchs were sufficiently impressed by his discovery to support three more voyages over the next twelve years. During those expeditions Columbus began the colonization of the West Indies, transporting more than a thousand Spanish settlers—all men—and hundreds of domestic animals. He also began the transatlantic trade in slaves, carrying hundreds of Indians to bondage in Europe and importing black slaves from Africa to work as artisans and farmers in the new Spanish settlements. However, Columbus failed to find either golden treasures or great kingdoms, so that his death in 1506 went virtually unrecognized. Other explorers soon followed Columbus, and a German geographer named the continents not after their European discoverer but after a Genoese mariner, Amerigo Vespucci, who had traveled to South America around 1500 and called it a *nuevo mundo*, a new world: America. For its part, the Spanish crown continued to call the new lands Las Indias (the Indies) and determined to make them a Spanish world.

The Spanish Conquest

Columbus and other Spanish adventurers ruled the peoples of the Caribbean islands with an iron hand, seizing their goods and exploiting their labor to grow sugarcane. After subduing the Arawaks and Tainos on Hispaniola, the Spanish probed coastal settlements on the mainland in search of booty. In 1513 Juan Ponce de León searched for gold and slaves along the coast of Florida and gave the peninsula its name. That same year Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Darien (Panama), becoming the first European to see the Pacific Ocean. Although these greedy adventurers found no gold, rumors of riches to the west encouraged others to launch an invasion of the interior. These men were not explorers or merchants but hardened veterans of the wars against the Muslims who were eager to do battle and get rich. To encourage these adventurers to expand its American empire, the Spanish crown offered them plunder, landed estates and Indian laborers in the conquered territory, and titles of nobility.

The Fall of the Aztecs and the Incas. The first great success of the Spanish *conquistadors* (conquerors) occurred in present-day Mexico (Map 1.5). In 1519 the ambitious and charismatic adventurer Hernán Cortés landed on the Mexican coast with 600 men and marched toward the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. Fortunately for the Spaniards, Cortés arrived in the very year in which Aztec mythology had predicted the return of the god Quetzalcoatl to his earthly kingdom. Believing that Cortés might be the returning god, Moctezuma, the Aztec ruler, acted indecisively. After an Aztec ambush against the conquistadors failed, Moctezuma allowed Cortés to proceed without challenge to Tenochtitlán and received him with great ceremony, only to become Cortés’s captive. When Moctezuma’s forces finally attempted to expel the invaders, they were confronted by superior European military technology. The sight of the Spaniards in full armor, with guns that shook the heavens and inflicted devastating wounds, made a deep impression on the Aztecs, who had learned how to purify gold and fashion it into ornate religious objects but did not produce iron tools or weapons. Moreover, the Aztecs had no wheeled carts or cavalry, and their warriors, fighting on foot with flint- or obsidian-tipped spears and arrows, were no match for mounted Spanish conquistadors wielding steel swords and aided by vicious attack dogs. Although heavily outnumbered and suffering great losses, Cortés and his men were able to fight their way out of the Aztec capital.

At this point, the vast population of the Aztec empire could easily have crushed the European invaders if the Indian peoples had remained united. But Cortés exploited the widespread resentment against the Aztecs, forming military alliances and raising thousands of



MAP 1.5 The Spanish Conquest of the Great Indian Civilizations

The Spanish first invaded the islands of the Caribbean. Rumors of a magnificent golden civilization led to Cortés's invasion of the Aztec empire in 1519. By 1535 other Spanish conquistadors had conquered the Mayan temple cities and the Inca empire in Peru, completing one of the great conquests in world history.

troops from subject peoples who had seen their wealth expropriated by Aztec nobles and their people sacrificed to the Aztec sun god. The Aztec empire collapsed, the victim not of superior Spanish military technology but of a vast internal rebellion of Indian peoples (see American Voices, “Aztec Elders Describe the Spanish Conquest,” p. 26).

As the Spanish sought to impose their dominion over the peoples of the Aztec empire, they had a silent ally—disease. Separated from Eurasia for thousands of years, the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere had no immunities to common European diseases. A massive smallpox epidemic lasting seventy days ravaged Tenochtitlán following the Spanish exodus, “striking everywhere in the city,” according to an Aztec source, killing Moctezuma’s brother and many others. “They could not move, they could not stir.... Covered, mantled with pustules, very many people died of them.” Subsequent outbreaks of smallpox, influenza, and measles killed hundreds of thousands of Aztecs and their subject peoples and sapped the morale of the survivors. Exploiting this demographic weakness, Cortés quickly extended Spanish rule over the entire Aztec

empire, and his lieutenants then moved against the Mayan city-states in the Yucatán Peninsula, eventually conquering them as well (see American Lives, “Cortés and Malinche: The Dynamics of Conquest,” p. 30).

In 1524 the Spanish conquest entered a new phase, when Francisco Pizarro led a military expedition to the mountains of Peru, home of the rich and powerful Inca empire that stretched 2,000 miles along the Pacific coast of South America. To govern this far-flung empire, the Inca rulers built 24,000 miles of roads and dozens of carefully placed administrative centers, which were constructed of finely crafted stone. A semidivine Inca king ruled the empire, assisted by a hierarchical bureaucracy staffed by noblemen, many of whom were his relatives. By the time Pizarro and his small force of 168 men and 67 horses reached Peru, half of the Inca population had died from European diseases, which had been spread by Indian traders. Weakened militarily and fighting over succession to the throne, the Inca nobility was easy prey for Pizarro’s army. In little more than a decade Spain had become the master of the wealthiest and most populous regions of the Western Hemisphere.

Friar Bernardino de Sahagún

Aztec Elders Describe the Spanish Conquest

During the 1550s Friar Bernardino de Sahagún published the Florentine Codex: General History of New Spain. According to Sahagún, the authors of the Codex were Aztec elders who lived through the conquest. Here the elders describe their reaction to the invading Europeans and the devastating impact of smallpox. They told their stories to Sahagún in a repetitive style, using the conventions of Aztec oral histories, and he translated them into Spanish.

Moctezuma enjoyed no sleep, no food, no one spoke to him. Whatsoever he did, it was as if he were in torment. Ofttimes it was as if he sighed, became weak, felt weak. . . . Wherefore he said, "What will now befall us? Who indeed stands [in charge]? Alas, until now, I. In great torment is my heart; as if it were washed in chili water it indeed burns." . . .

And when he had so heard what the messengers reported, he was terrified, he was astounded. . . . Especially did it cause him to faint away when he heard how the gun, at [the Spaniards'] command, discharged: how it resounded as if it thundered when it went off. It indeed bereft one of strength; it shut off one's ears. And when it discharged, something like a round pebble came forth from within. Fire went showering forth; sparks went

blazing forth. And its smoke smelled very foul; it had a fetid odor which verily wounded the head. And when [the shot] struck a mountain, it was as if it were destroyed, dissolved . . . as if someone blew it away.

All iron was their war array. In iron they clothed themselves. With iron they covered their heads. Iron were their swords. Iron were their crossbows. Iron were their shields. Iron were their lances. And those which bore them upon their backs, their deer [horses], were as tall as roof terraces.

And their bodies were everywhere covered; only their faces appeared. They were very white; they had chalky faces; they had yellow hair, though the hair of some was black. . . . And when Moctezuma so heard, he was much terrified. It was as if he fainted away. His heart saddened; his heart failed him. . . .

[Soon] there came to be prevalent a great sickness, a plague. It was in Tepeilhuitl that it originated, that there spread over the people a great destruction of men. Some it indeed covered [with pustules]; they were spread everywhere, on one's face, on one's head, on one's breast. There was indeed perishing; many indeed died of it. No longer could they walk; they only lay in their abodes, in their beds. No longer could they move. . . . And when they bestirred themselves, much did they cry out. There was much perishing. Like a covering, covering-like, were the pustules. Indeed, many people died of them, and many just died of hunger. There was death from hunger; there was no one to take care of another; there was no one to attend to another.

Source: Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of New Spain*, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe and Salt Lake City: School of American Research and University of Utah Press, 1975), 12:17–20, 26, 83.

The Legacy of the Conquest. The Spanish invasion and European diseases changed life forever throughout the Americas. Virtually all the Indians of Hispaniola—at least 300,000 people—were wiped out by disease and warfare. In Peru the population plummeted from 9 million in 1530 to fewer than half a million a century later. Likewise, diseases unintentionally introduced by early Spanish expeditions in the present-day United States inflicted equally catastrophic losses on the Pueblo peoples of the Southwest and the Mississippian chiefdoms of the Southeast. In 1500 Mesoamerica as a

whole had probably 40 million Indians; by 1650 its Native American population had fallen to a mere 3 million people—one of the greatest demographic disasters in world history.

Once the conquistadors had triumphed, the Spanish government quickly created an elaborate bureaucratic empire, headed in Madrid by the Council of the Indies, which issued laws and decrees to viceroys and other Spanish-born officials in America. However, the conquistadors remained powerful because they held grants (*encomiendas*) from the crown giving them legal



Premonition of Disaster

In 1570 Fray Diego Durán, a Spanish Dominican monk, recorded the history of Aztec people. This leaf from his manuscript captures the moment when Moctezuma first hears of the arrival of white-skinned strangers on the coast of the empire that he ruled. The watercolor shows the comet that Moctezuma reportedly saw plunging to the earth, an event that according to Aztec belief was a harbinger of disaster. Library of Congress.

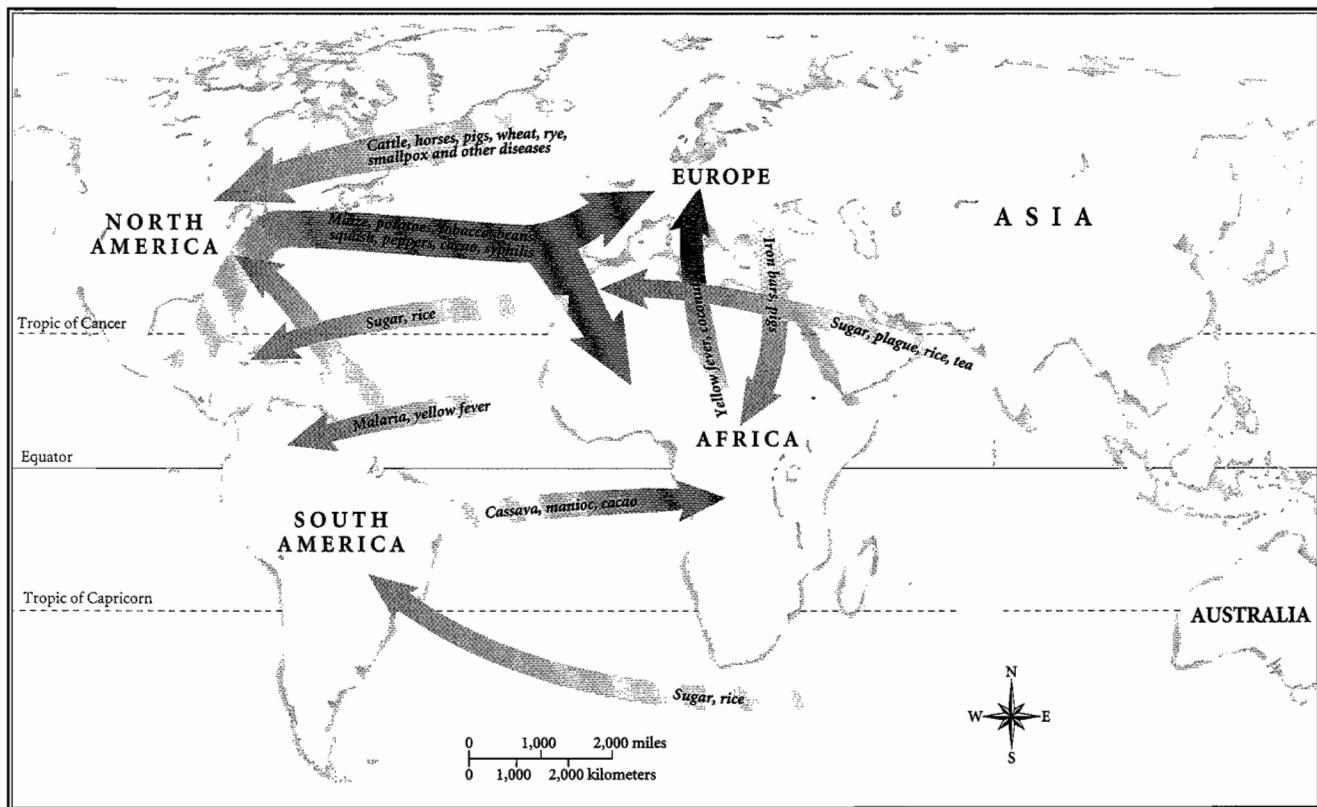
control of the native population. They ruthlessly exploited the surviving Native Americans, forcing them to work on vast plantations to raise crops and cattle for local consumption and export to Europe. The Spaniards also altered the natural environment by introducing grains and grasses that supplanted the native flora. Horses, first brought to the mainland by Cortés, gradually spread throughout the Western Hemisphere and in the following centuries dramatically changed the way of life of many Indian peoples, especially on the Great Plains of the United States.

The Spanish invasion of the Americas had a significant impact on life in Europe and Africa as well. In a process of transfer known as the **Columbian Exchange**, the food products of the Western Hemisphere—especially maize, potatoes, and cassava (manioc)—became available to the peoples of other continents, significantly increasing agricultural yields and stimulating the growth of population (Map 1.6). Similarly, the livestock and crops—and weeds and human diseases—of African and Eurasian lands became part of the lives of residents

of the Americas. Nor was that all. In addition to this ecological revolution, the gold and silver that had honored Aztec gods flowed into the countinghouses of Spain and into the treasury of its monarchs, making that nation the most powerful in Europe.

By 1550 the once magnificent civilizations of Mexico and Peru lay in ruins. “Of all these wonders”—the great city of Tenochtitlán, rich orchards, overflowing markets—“all is overthrown and lost, nothing left standing,” recalled the Spanish chronicler Bernal Díaz, who had been a young soldier in Cortés’s army. Moreover, those Native Americans who survived had lost vital parts of their cultural identity. Spanish priests suppressed their worship of traditional gods and converted them to Catholicism. As early as 1531 an Indian convert reported a vision of a dark-skinned Virgin Mary, later known as the Virgin of Guadalupe, a Christian version of the “corn mother” who traditionally protected the maize crop.

Soon Spanish bureaucrats imposed taxes and supervised the lives of the Indians, as no fewer than 350,000



MAP 1.6 The Columbian Exchange

As European traders and adventurers traveled to Africa, the Americas, and Asia between 1450 and 1600, they began what historians call the “Columbian Exchange,” a vast intercontinental movement of the plants, animals, and diseases that changed the course of historical development. As the nutritious, high-yielding American crops of corn and potatoes enriched the diets of Europeans and Africans, the Eurasian and African diseases of smallpox, diphtheria, malaria, and yellow fever nearly wiped out the native inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere and virtually ensured that they would lose control of their lands.

For more help analyzing this map, see the ONLINE STUDY GUIDE at bedfordstmartins.com/henretta.

Spanish migrants settled between 1500 and 1650 on lands previously occupied by the native peoples of Mesoamerica and South America. Because nearly 90 percent of the Spanish settlers were men who took Indian women as wives or mistresses, the result was a substantial **mestizo** (mixed-race) population and an elaborate system of race-based caste distinctions. Around 1800, at the end of the colonial era, Spanish America had about 17 million people: 7.5 million Indians, 3.2 million Europeans, 1 million enslaved Africans, and 5.5 million people of mixed race and cultural heritage.

Some Indians resisted assimilation by retreating into the mountains, but they lacked the numbers or the power to oust the Spanish invaders or their descendants. Today only a single Indian tongue, Guarani in Paraguay, is a recognized national language, and no Native American state has representation in the United Nations. For

the original Americans the consequences of the European intrusion in 1492 were tragic and irreversible.

The Protestant Reformation and the Rise of England

Religion was a central aspect of European life and, because of a major crisis in Western Christendom, played a crucial role in the settlement of America. Even as Christian fervor drove Portugal and Spain to expel Muslims and Jews from their nations and to convert the peoples of Mesoamerica to Catholicism, Christianity ceased to be a unifying force in European society. New religious doctrines preached by Martin Luther and other reformers divided Christians into armed ideological camps of

Table 1.2 Spanish Monarchs, 1474–1598		
Monarch	Dates of Reign	Achievements
Ferdinand and Isabel	1474–1516	Expelled Muslims from Spain; dispatched Columbus
Charles I	1516–1556	Holy Roman Emperor, 1519–1556
Philip II	1556–1598	Attacked Protestantism; mounted Spanish Armada

Catholics and Protestants and plunged the continent into religious wars that lasted for decades.

These struggles set the stage for Protestant dominance of North America. In the 1560s a Protestant rebellion in the Spanish Netherlands led to Holland's emergence as a separate nation and a major commercial power in both Asia and the Americas. England likewise experienced a religious revolution and a major economic transformation that gave it the physical resources and spiritual energy to establish Protestant settlements in North America.

The Protestant Movement

Over the centuries the Catholic Church had become a large and wealthy institution, controlling vast resources throughout Europe. Renaissance popes and cardinals were among the leading patrons of the arts, but some also misused the Church's wealth. Pope Leo X (r. 1513–1521) was the most notorious, receiving half a million ducats a year from the sale of religious offices. Ordinary priests and monks regularly used their authority to obtain economic or sexual favors. One English reformer denounced the clergy as a "gang of scoundrels" who should be "rid of their vices or stripped of their authority," but he was ignored. Other reformers, such as Jan Hus of Bohemia, were tried and executed as heretics.

Martin Luther's Attack on Church Doctrine. In 1517 Martin Luther, a German monk and professor at the university in Wittenberg, nailed his famous Ninety-five Theses to the door of the castle church. That widely reprinted document condemned the sale of **indulgences**—church certificates that purportedly pardoned a sinner from punishments in the afterlife. Luther argued that heavenly salvation could come only from God through grace, not from the Church for a fee. He was excommunicated by the pope and threatened with punishment by King Charles I of Spain (r. 1516–1556), the head of the Holy Roman Empire, which included most of Germany (Table 1.2). Northern German princes, who were resisting the emperor's authority for political reasons, embraced Luther's

teachings and protected him from arrest, thus allowing the Protestant movement to flourish.

Luther broadened his attack, articulating positions that differed from Roman Catholic doctrine in three major respects. First, Luther rejected the doctrine that Christians could win salvation through good deeds, arguing that people could be saved only by grace, which came as a free gift from God. Second, he downplayed the role of clergy and the pope as mediators between God and the people, proclaiming, "Our baptism consecrates us all without exception and makes us all priests." Third, Luther said that believers must look to the Bible (not Church doctrine) as the ultimate authority in matters of faith. So that every German-speaking believer could read the Bible, he translated it from Latin into German.

Peasants as well as princes heeded Luther's attack on authority and, to his dismay, mounted social protests of their own. In 1524 some German peasants rebelled against their manorial lords and were ruthlessly suppressed. Fearing social revolution, Luther urged obedience to established political institutions and condemned the teachings of new groups of religious dissidents, such as the Anabaptists (so called because they rejected infant baptism).

Embracing Luther's views, most princes in northern Germany broke from Rome, in part because they wanted the power to appoint bishops and control the Church's property within their own domains. In response, Emperor Charles dispatched armies to Germany to restore Catholic doctrine and his political authority, unleashing a generation of warfare. Eventually the Peace of Augsburg (1555) restored order by allowing princes to decide the religion of their subjects. Most southern German rulers installed Catholicism as the official religion, while those in the north made Lutheranism the state creed (Map 1.7).

The Teachings of John Calvin. The most rigorous Protestant doctrine was established in Geneva, Switzerland, under the leadership of the French theologian John Calvin. Even more than Luther, Calvin stressed the omnipotence of God and the corruption of human nature. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) depicted God as an awesome and absolute sovereign who

Cortés and Malinche: The Dynamics of Conquest

Hernán Cortés conquered an empire and destroyed a civilization, an achievement that was both magnificent and tragic. The immensity of Cortés's dual triumph was partly accidental, owing to the rebellion of the non-Aztec peoples and the extraordinarily devastating impact of European diseases, but it also reflected his burning ambition and political vision. Unlike most other gold-hungry Spanish adventurers, Cortés had a sense of politics and of history. Once he learned from the Maya, in whose territory he first landed, of the existence of Moctezuma and his kingdom, Cortés's priority became the pursuit of power rather than of plunder. As Bernal Díaz del Castillo, one of his soldiers, reported in the *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, Cortés immediately declared his intention "to serve God and the king" by subjugating the Aztec king and his great empire.

Could this be done? Six hundred Spanish troops might plunder the lands at the far reaches of an empire of millions, but what chance did they stand against an Aztec army of tens of thousands? The odds of conquering the Aztec empire were so low that a less audacious man would not even have tried. But Cortés was no ordinary man. A person of great presence—intelligent and ruthless, courageous yet prudent, decisive yet flexible—the Spanish chieftain inspired fear and respect among his enemies and unthinking loyalty among his followers, who time and again risked their lives at his command. No one was more loyal to Cortés—and, at crucial points in the conquest of Mexico, more important—than the native woman known as La Malinche, who became his interpreter and mistress. Had he not conquered her affections, he might have failed to conquer the empire.

As a child, the girl who became Malinche was called Malinali, the name of the twelfth month in the Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztec and other Mexican peoples. Her father was the local lord of Painala, a village near the Gulf of Mexico in the far southern reaches of the Aztec empire, and her mother was the ruler of Xatipan, a small nearby settlement. As the daughter of minor nobles, Malinali lived in comfort and no doubt developed the sense of confidence that would serve her so well in

the future. But she lived her adolescent years as a mere slave. Following the death of her father and the remarriage of her mother, Malinali was sold into bondage by her mother and stepfather, who wanted to enhance the succession rights of their newborn son. Owned first by merchants, she ended up as an enslaved worker in the Mayan settlement of Potonchan on the Gulf of Mexico. There, in March 1519 when she was about seventeen years old, Malinali had her rendezvous with destiny.

Initially the confrontation between Spaniards and Native Americans took place with gestures and misunderstandings, for the two peoples could not comprehend each other's language, intentions, and values. But Cortés was lucky, for his expedition had chanced upon Father Gerónimo de Aguilar, a shipwrecked Spanish priest who had lived for a decade as a slave among the Mayas and knew their language. And he was doubly lucky when the Mayas of Potonchan, whom he had defeated in battle, presented him with twenty slave women, one of whom was Malinali. Cortés treated these women as servants and concubines, assigning them to his commanders; and because Malinali was "of pleasing appearance and sharp-witted and outward-going" (according to Díaz del Castillo), she was given to his chief lieutenant, Alonso Puertocarrero. Learning that the young woman could speak Nahuatl, Cortés soon took her as his own servant and mistress. At his command she conversed with Nahuatl-speaking peoples and then used Mayan to convey what she had learned to Aguilar, who translated it into Spanish. The process was cumbersome, but it worked. Now Cortés could negotiate directly with both Moctezuma's officials and the leaders of the non-Aztec peoples whose help he needed to conquer the empire.

Of Malinali's motives in providing aid to the Spanish invaders there is no record. Like other Mexican peoples, including Moctezuma, at first she may have viewed Cortés as a returning god. Or, like his Spanish followers, she may have been dazzled by his powerful presence and personality. Or, quite likely, Malinali may have calculated that Cortés was her best hope of escaping slavery and reclaiming a noble status. Whatever the reasons, Malinali's loyalty to her new master was complete and unbending. Rejecting an opportunity to betray the Spanish on their march to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán in 1519, she risked her life by warning Cortés of a surprise attack by the Cholulans. In 1520 she stood by him when the Spanish cause seemed lost following the disastrous retreat from Tenochtitlán. And in 1524 and 1525 she helped him survive a catastrophic military campaign in the jungles of present-day Honduras.



Malinche and Cortés

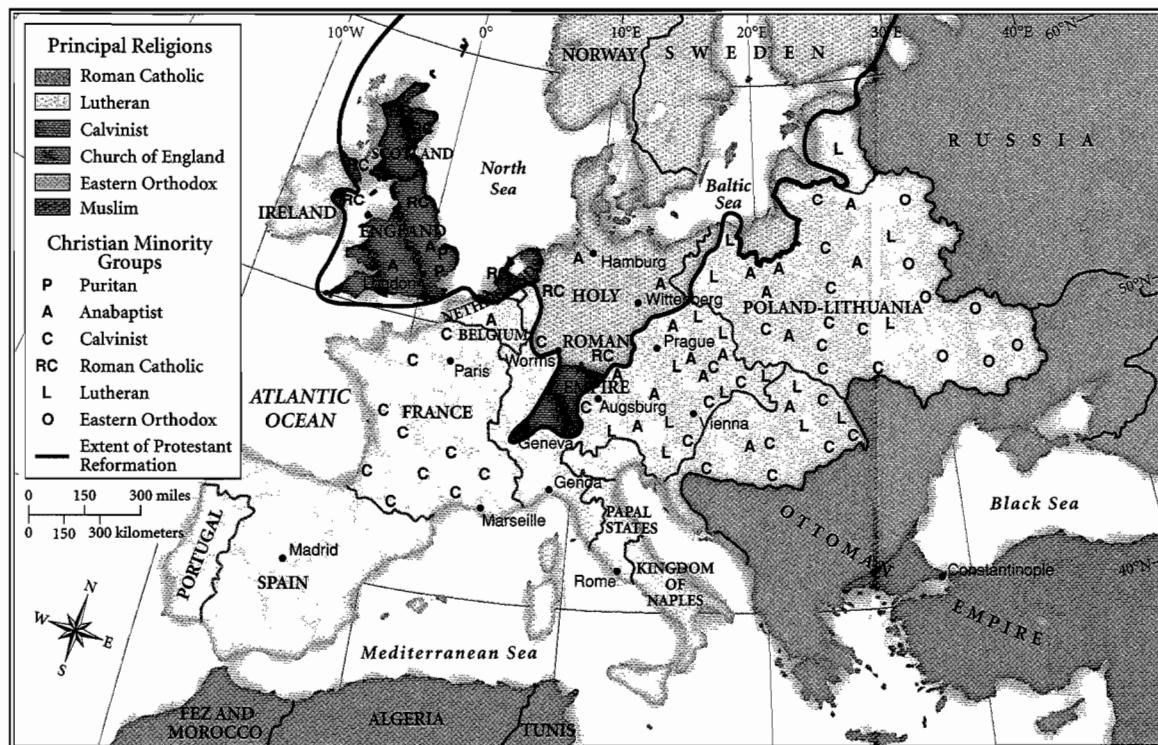
In this Aztec pictograph (c. 1540) Cortés is shown with his Nahuatl-speaking interpreter, mistress, and advisor Malinche (or Marina in Spanish). Signifying her dual identity as an Indian and a European, Malinche wears native clothes while holding up the Christian rosary. Bibliothèque Nationale.

There is no question about Malinali's importance to the Spanish cause. As Bernal Díaz del Castillo concluded, "without her we never should have understood the Mexican language and, upon the whole, [would] have been unable to surmount many difficulties." The Aztecs likewise acknowledged her eminence. They called her Malinche, addressing her with respect by adding the suffix *-che* to her original name, and they often referred to Cortés as "the captain of Malinche," defining the Spaniard in terms of the interpreter through whom he spoke.

Yet there is no evidence that Cortés felt indebted to Malinche or developed a deep emotional bond with the young woman. In 1522 or 1523 she bore him a son (whom he named Martin after his father), but by then he had taken many other mistresses, including the daughters of Moctezuma, and in succeeding years sired numerous illegitimate children by other Mexican women. Moreover, in 1525 Cortés again gave the services of Malinali, now known by the respectful Spanish name of Doña Marina, to one of his commanders, Juan Jaramillo, with whom she lived in marriage until her death in 1551. A mere native woman was not what the

great conqueror had in mind as a wife. To solidify his achievement and lay the foundation for a great family dynasty, in 1528 Cortés won entry into the ranks of the Spanish nobility, taking as his wife Juana, daughter of the count of Aguilar and a niece of the duke of Béjar, one of the richest and most politically powerful men in Spain. After living with Juana in Mexico for a decade Cortés returned to his native land, where he died in 1547 at the age of sixty-two, a respected and colossally wealthy man.

Malinche fared less well than her former master did, in death as well as in life. Because she was among the first native women to bear mixed-race (mestizo) children, Malinche has sometimes been celebrated as the symbolic mother of the post-conquest Mexican people. More often, she has seemed to subsequent generations of Mexicans as a traitor to her people, a mere instrument in the hands of greedy invaders who subjugated a society and destroyed a civilization. Within the dynamics of sexual and military conquest, both views are correct.



MAP 1.7 Religious Diversity in Europe, 1600

By 1600 Europe was permanently divided. Catholicism remained dominant in the south, but Lutheran princes and monarchs ruled northern Europe, and Calvinism had strongholds in Switzerland, Holland, and Scotland. Radical sects were persecuted by legally established Protestant churches as well as by Catholic clergy and monarchs. These religious conflicts encouraged the migration of minority sects to America.

governed the “wills of men so as to move precisely to that end directed by him.” Calvin preached the doctrine of **predestination**—the idea that God had chosen certain people for salvation even before they were born, condemning the rest to eternal damnation. In Geneva he set up a model Christian community, eliminating bishops and placing spiritual power in the hands of ministers chosen by the members of each congregation. These ministers and pious laymen ruled the city, prohibiting frivolity and luxury and imposing religious discipline on the entire society. “We know,” wrote Calvin, “that man is of so perverse and crooked a nature, that everyone would scratch out his neighbor’s eyes if there were no bridle to hold them in.” Despite widespread persecution, Calvinists won converts all over Europe. Calvinism was adopted by the Huguenots in France, by the Protestant (or Reformed) churches in Belgium and Holland, and by Presbyterians and Puritans in Scotland and England.

Protestantism in England. In England, King Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547) initially opposed the spread of Protestantism in his kingdom. But when the pope denied his request for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Henry broke with Rome in 1534 and made

himself the head of a national Church of England (which promptly granted the annulment). Although Henry made few changes in Church doctrine, organization, and ritual, his daughter Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) approved a Protestant confession of faith that incorporated both the Lutheran doctrine of salvation by grace and the Calvinist belief in predestination. To mollify traditionalists Elizabeth retained the Catholic ritual of Holy Communion—now conducted in English rather than in Latin—as well as the hierarchy of bishops and archbishops.

Elizabeth’s compromises angered radical Protestants, who condemned the power of bishops as “anti-Christian and devilish and contrary to the Scriptures” and demanded major changes in Church organization. Many of these reformers took inspiration from the Presbyterian system pioneered in Calvin’s Geneva and developed fully by John Knox for the Church of Scotland; in Scotland local congregations elected lay elders (presbyters), who assisted ministers in running the Church, and sent delegates to synods (councils) that decided Church doctrine. By 1600, at least five hundred ministers in the Church of England wanted to eliminate bishops and install a Presbyterian form of church government.

Other radical English Protestants were calling themselves “unspotted lambs of the Lord” or “Puritans.” More intensely than most Protestants they wanted to “purify” the Church of “false” Catholic teachings and practices. Following radical Calvinist principles, Puritans condemned many traditional religious rites as magical or idolatrous. Puritan services avoided appeals to dead saints or the burning of incense and instead focused on a carefully argued sermon on ethics or dogma. Puritans also placed special emphasis on the idea of a “calling,” the duty to serve God in one’s work. To ensure that all men and women had access to God’s commands, they encouraged everyone to read the Bible, thus promoting widespread literacy. Finally, most Puritans wanted authority over spiritual and financial matters to rest primarily with the local congregation, not with bishops or even Presbyterian synods (church councils). Eventually thousands of Puritan migrants would establish churches in North America based on these radical Protestant doctrines.

The Dutch and the English Challenge Spain

Luther’s challenge to Catholicism in 1517 came just two years before Cortés conquered the Aztec empire, and the two events remained linked. Gold and silver from Mexico and Peru made Spain the wealthiest nation in Europe and King Philip II (r. 1556–1598), the successor to Charles I, its most powerful ruler. In addition to Spain, Philip presided over wealthy city-states in Italy, the commercial

and manufacturing provinces of the Spanish Netherlands (present-day Holland and Belgium), and, after 1580, Portugal and all its possessions in America, Africa, and the East Indies. “If the Romans were able to rule the world simply by ruling the Mediterranean,” a Spanish priest boasted, “what of the man who rules the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, since they surround the world?”

Philip, an ardent Catholic, tried to root out Protestantism in the Netherlands, which had become wealthy from trade with the vast Portuguese empire and from the weaving of wool and linen. To protect their Calvinist faith and political liberties, the Dutch and Flemish provinces revolted in 1566, and in 1581 the seven northern provinces declared their independence, becoming the Dutch Republic (or Holland). When Elizabeth I of England dispatched 6,000 troops to assist the Dutch cause, Philip found a new enemy. In 1588 he sent the Spanish Armada—130 ships and 30,000 men—against England. Philip planned to reimpose Catholicism in England and then wipe out Calvinism in Holland. However, the Armada failed utterly, as English ships and a fierce storm destroyed the Spanish fleet. Philip continued to spend his American gold on foreign wars, undermining the Spanish economy and prompting the migration of hundreds of thousands of Spaniards to America. By the time of his death in 1598, Spain was in serious decline.

As Spain faltered, Holland prospered, the economic miracle of the seventeenth century. Amsterdam emerged as the financial capital of northern Europe, and the Dutch Republic became the leading commercial power of Europe, replacing Portugal as the dominant trader in



Dutch Merchant Family

This painting of Pierre de Moucheron and his family by the Dutch artist Cornelius de Zeeuw captures the prosperity and the severe Calvinist ethos of Holland in the sixteenth century. It also suggests the character of the traditional patriarchal family, in which status reflected a rigid hierarchy of gender and age. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

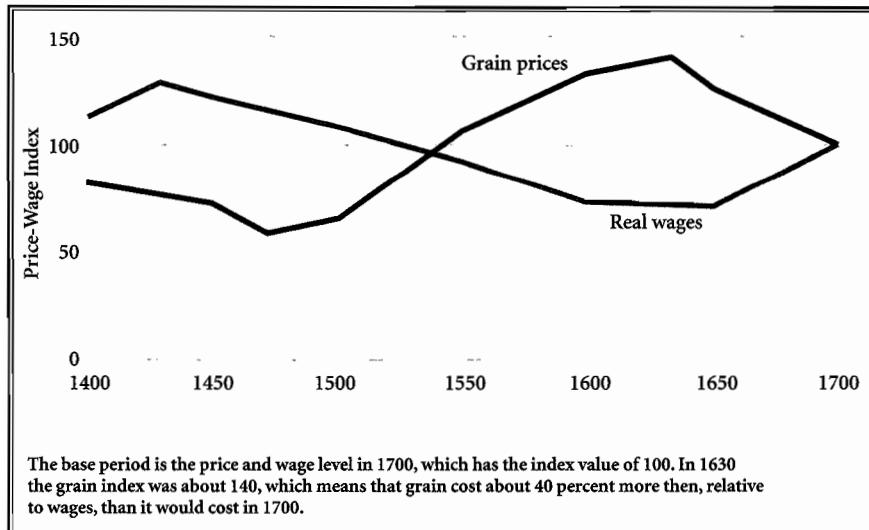


FIGURE 1.2 The Great Price Inflation and Living Standards in Europe

As American gold and silver poured into Europe after 1520, there was more money in circulation and people used it to bid up the price of grain. Grain prices also rose because of increasing demand; the result of growth in Europe's population. Because prices rose faster than wages living standards fell from a high point about 1430 to a low point about 1630. As "real wages" rose after 1630, people lived better.

Asia and coastal Africa. The Dutch also looked across the Atlantic, creating the West India Company, which invested in sugar plantations in Brazil and the Caribbean and established the fur-trading colony of New Netherland in North America.

England also emerged as an important European state, its economy stimulated by a rise in population from 3 million in 1500 to 5 million in 1630. An equally important factor was the state-supported expansion of the merchant community. English merchants had long supplied

high-quality wool to European weavers, and around 1500 they created their own system of textile production. In this **outwork** (or putting-out) system merchants bought wool from the owners of great estates and provided it to landless peasants, who spun and wove the wool into cloth. The merchants then sold the finished product in English and foreign markets. The government helped manufacturers to expand production by setting low rates for wages and assisted merchants to increase exports by granting special monopoly privileges to the Levant Company (Turkey) in



Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603)

Attired in richly decorated clothes that symbolize her power, Queen Elizabeth I relishes the destruction of the Spanish Armada (pictured in background) and proclaims her nation's imperial ambitions. The queen's hand rests on a globe, asserting England's claims in the Western Hemisphere.

Woburn Abbey Collection, by permission of the Marquess of Tavistock and the Trustees of the Bedford Estates.

1581, the Guinea Company (Africa) in 1588, and the East India Company in 1600.

This system of state-assisted manufacturing and trade became known as mercantilism. Mercantilist-minded monarchs like Elizabeth I encouraged merchants to invest in domestic manufacturing, thereby increasing exports and reducing imports, in order to give England a favorable balance of trade. The queen and her advisors wanted gold and silver to flow into the country in payment for English manufactures, stimulating further economic expansion and enriching the merchant community. Increased trade also meant higher revenues from import duties, which swelled the royal treasury and enhanced the power of the national government. By 1600 the success of these merchant-oriented policies had laid the foundations for overseas colonization. The English (as well as the Dutch) now had the merchant fleets and economic wealth needed to challenge Spain's monopoly in the Western Hemisphere.

The Social Causes of English Colonization

England's monarchs and ministers of state had long been interested in America. Now economic changes in England (as well as continuing religious conflict) provided a large body of settlers willing to go to America. The massive expenditure of American gold and silver by Philip II and the Spanish conquistadors had doubled the money supply of Europe and sparked a major inflation between 1530 and 1600—known today as the Price Revolution—that brought about profound social changes in the English countryside (Figure 1.2).

The Decline of the Nobility. In England the nobility was the first casualty of the **Price Revolution**. Aristocrats had customarily rented out their estates on long leases for fixed rents, gaining a secure income and plenty of leisure. As one English nobleman put it, “We eat and drink and rise up to play and this is to live like a gentleman.” Then inflation struck. In less than two generations the price of goods more than tripled while the nobility’s income from the rents on its farmlands barely increased. As the wealth and status of the aristocracy declined in relative terms, that of the **gentry** and the yeomen rose. The gentry (nonnoble landholders with substantial estates) kept pace with inflation by renting land on short leases at higher rates. Yeomen, described by a European traveler as “middle people of a condition between gentlemen and peasants,” owned small farms that they worked with family help. As wheat prices tripled, yeomen used the profits to build larger houses and provide their children with land.

Economics influenced politics. As aristocrats lost wealth, their branch of Parliament, the House of Lords, declined in influence. At the same time, members of the rising gentry entered the House of Commons, the political voice of the propertied classes. Supported by the yeomen, the gentry demanded new rights and powers for the Commons, such as control of taxation. Thus the Price Revolution encouraged the rise of governing institutions in which rich commoners and small property owners had a voice, a development with profound consequences for English—and American—political history.

The Dispossession of the Peasantry. Peasants and landless farm laborers made up three-fourths of the population of England (Figure 1.3), and their lives also were transformed by the Price Revolution. Many of these rural folk lived in open-field settlements, but the rise of domestic manufacturing increased the demand for wool, prompting profit-minded landlords and wool merchants to persuade Parliament to pass **enclosure acts**. These acts allowed owners to fence in open fields and put sheep to graze on them. Thus dispossessed of their land, peasant families lived on the brink of poverty, spinning and weaving wool or working as wage laborers on large estates. Wealthy men had “taken farms into their hands,” an observer noted in 1600, “and rent them to those that will give most, whereby the

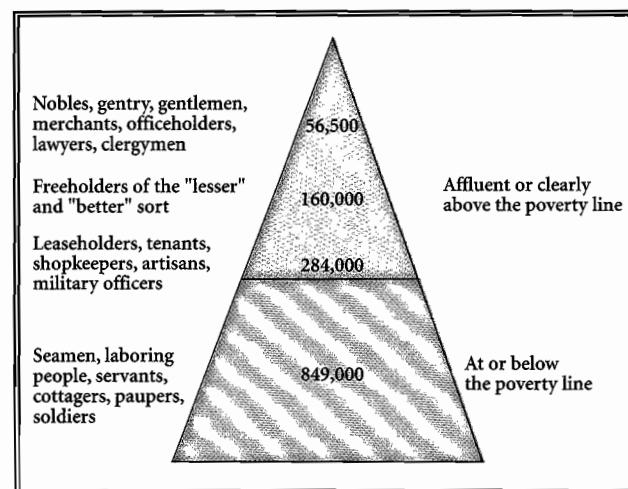


FIGURE 1.3 The Structure of English Society, 1688

This famous table, the work of Gregory King, an early statistician, shows the result of centuries of aristocratic rule. It depicts a social structure shaped like a thin pyramid, with a small privileged elite at the top and a mass of poor working people at the bottom. The majority of English families (some 849,000, according to King) lived at or below the poverty line and, he thought, were “Decreasing the Wealth of the Kingdom.” In fact, the labor of the poor produced much of the wealth owned by the 500,500 families at the middle and the top of the social scale.

peasantry of England is decayed and become servants to gentlemen.”

These changes, and a series of crop failures caused by cold weather between 1590 and 1640, set the stage for a substantial migration to America. As the danger of starvation increased and land prices continued to rise, thousands of yeomen families looked across the Atlantic for land for their children. Dispossessed peasants and weavers, their livelihoods threatened by a decline in the cloth trade, were likewise on the move. “Thieves and rogues do swarm the highways,” warned Justice of the Peace William Lamparde, “and bastards be multiplied in parishes.” Seeking food and security, tens of thousands of young propertyless laborers contracted to go to America in the lowly condition of indentured servants. This massive migration of English yeomen families and impoverished laborers would bring about

a new collision between the European and Native American worlds.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- ▶ For definitions of key terms boldfaced in this chapter, see the glossary at the end of the book.
- ▶ To assess your mastery of the material covered in this chapter, see the Online Study Guide at bedfordstmartins.com/henretta.
- ▶ For suggested references, including Web sites, see page SR-1 at the end of the book.
- ▶ For map resources and primary documents, see bedfordstmartins.com/henretta.

The first inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere were hunter-gatherers who migrated from Asia some thirty thousand years ago. Their descendants settled throughout the Americas, establishing a great variety of cultures. In Mesoamerica, the Mayan and Aztec peoples created populous agricultural societies with sophisticated systems of art, religion, and politics, while the Incas set up an empire along the western coast of South America. In North America, the Hopewell and Mississippian peoples created elaborate ceremonial and urban sites, as did the Pueblo peoples of the Southwest. However, in 1500 most Indians north of the Rio Grande lived in small-scale communities of hunters and farmers.

The Europeans who invaded America came from a traditional agricultural society ruled by a privileged elite. Christianity provided unity and spiritual meaning to European civilization. Both church and state endorsed hierarchy and authority, demanding that peasants submit to strict discipline. Carried by settlers to America, these values of order and security strongly influenced colonial life.

The Crusades exposed Europeans to the learning of the Arab Muslim world, while the Italian Renaissance and the rise of monarchical nation-states imparted dynamism to European society. Portugal sent explorers and merchants to Africa and Asia and sold enslaved West Africans to sugar planters in the Mediterranean and later in Brazil. Spain conquered Mexico and Peru, the wealthiest areas of the “new world” found by Christopher Columbus. The coming of Europeans—and their diseases, crops, horses, government, and religion—brought death to millions of Native Americans and altered the ecology of Western Hemisphere. Likewise, the Columbian exchange and mass emigration of Europeans and enslaved Africans to the Americas changed the character of the “old world.”

Thus, gold and silver from America disrupted Europe’s economy and society, which was already reeling from the Protestant Reformation. Religious warfare and the Price Revolution undermined Catholic Spain while assisting the rise of Holland, France, and England. In England, monarchs used mercantilist policies to promote domestic manufacturing and foreign trade, while the enclosure acts and religious conflicts prompted a mass migration to America.

English migrants carried both traditional and modern ideas and institutions across the Atlantic—a contrast between old and new that was sharpened in America: in England’s Chesapeake colonies a new form of aristocratic rule would emerge, based first on white indentured servitude and then on African slavery, while in New England the settlers would establish a yeoman society that had few European antecedents.

13,000–3000 b.c.	Main settlement of North America
3000–2000 b.c.	Cultivation of crops begins in Mesoamerica
100–400	Flourishing of Hopewell culture
300	Rise of Mayan civilization
500	Zenith of Teotihuacán civilization
600	Emergence of Pueblo cultures
700–1100	Spread of Arab Muslim civilization
800–1350	Development of Mississippian culture
1096–1291	Crusades link Europe with Arab learning
1300–1450	Italian Renaissance
1325	Aztecs establish capital at Tenochtitlán
1440s	Portugal enters trade in African slaves
1492	Christopher Columbus’s first voyage to America
1513	Juan Ponce de León explores Florida
1517	Martin Luther begins Protestant Reformation
1519–1521	Hernán Cortés conquers Aztec empire
1531–1538	Francisco Pizarro vanquishes Incas in Peru
1534	Henry VIII establishes Church of England
1536	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of Christian Religion</i>
1550–1630	Price Revolution English mercantilism Enclosure acts
1556–1598	Philip I, king of Spain
1558–1603	Elizabeth I, queen of England
1560s	English Puritan movement begins

The manner of their fishing.

