The Americas in the Early Colonial Period

We are crushed to the ground; we lie in ruins.
There is nothing but grief and suffering in
Mexico and Tlatelolco, where once we
saw beauty and valor.

—from “Flowers and Songs of Sorrow,” anonymous
Aztec poet, (c. 1521–1540)

The first transatlantic voyage by Christopher Columbus in 1492 was the initial event in what is known as the Columbian Exchange—the widespread sharing of animals, plants, cultures, ideas, technologies, and diseases between Afro-Eurasian cultures and the native peoples of the Americas.

European Interests in the Americas Columbus and other European explorers were seeking a new route to Asia and hoping to find gold, silver, and other valuable resources. The Spanish found so little of value in their first two decades of contact that they considered stopping further exploration. The English, after sponsoring voyages in the 1490s, made little attempt to explore or settle for almost a century.

However, European interest in the Americas was rekindled when the Spanish came into contact with the two major empires in the region, the Aztecs in Mesoamerica and the Incas in South America. These empires had the gold and silver that made exploration, conquest, and settlement profitable. In addition, Europeans soon realized that, by using enslaved Native Americans and later enslaved Africans, they could grow wealthy by raising sugar, tobacco, and other valuable crops.

Interaction of Cultures As the excerpt from the poem above suggests, initial contact and the subsequent conquest and colonization of the Americas did not bode well for the native peoples. Overpowered by superior weapons and decimated by disease, many native populations declined, dissipated, or were forced to submit to new rulers and a new religion.

Although European conquest seriously damaged entire native societies and their ways of life, eventually new ways of life developed out of the interaction of three broad traditions of culture: indigenous American, European, and African.
Why Did the Europeans Want to Explore?

There were several motives for the new age of European exploration that began in the late 1400s:

- Italian cities with ports on the Mediterranean had a monopoly on European trade with Asia. By controlling access to the trade routes, the Italians controlled prices of Asian imports to Europe, driving Spain and Portugal, and later France, England, and the Netherlands, into the search for new routes to Asia.

- Various inventions made it possible for Europeans to venture farther out into the ocean. The magnetic compass, originally invented in China, made it easier to steer a ship in the right direction. The astrolabe, improved by Muslim navigators in the twelfth century, allowed sailors to determine how far north or south they were from the equator. The caravel, a small, three-masted sailing ship developed by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, allowed sailors to survive storms at sea better than earlier-designed ships.

- Many Europeans believed that it was their Christian duty to seek out people in other lands to convert them.

- Explorers hoped to find riches overseas, especially gold and silver.

Christopher Columbus was fortunate in 1492 to gain the support of the Spanish monarchs, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, for his voyages across the Atlantic. For his first voyage, he had the use of two caravels and one larger ship. Columbus was successful in reaching the Americas, although that had not been his intent: he had wanted to get to the East Indies or China.

Diseases and Demographic Catastrophe

Demography, which refers to population patterns and changes, was an important feature in the European conquest of the Americas. Up until this era, the peoples of the Western and Eastern Hemispheres had been almost completely isolated from each other. For that reason, the indigenous people of the Americas had no exposure to the germs and diseases brought by Europeans. Although European horses, gunpowder, and metal weapons were instrumental in subjugating indigenous Americans, disease was responsible for the majority of deaths, including those among the Taínos, a group of Arawaks native to the Caribbean. Conquistadores, Spanish conquerors such as Francisco Pizarro, Hernán Cortés, and Columbus, brought smallpox with them. Smallpox pathogens are spread through the respiratory system. When Europeans, who were largely immune had face-to-face contact with indigenous populations, they infected these populations with the deadly disease. In addition to smallpox, measles and influenza also killed many native peoples of the Americas. Historians estimate that the indigenous population fell by more than 50 percent through disease alone in less than a century. Some American lands lost up to 90 percent of their original populations. It was one of the greatest demographic disasters in history.
Columbian Exchange

Germ and disease transmissions were only one part of what is now called the Columbian Exchange. Another major component of the exchange was the sharing of new crops and livestock in both directions. Before the exchange began around 1500, Mesoamerican peoples consumed very little meat. Although contemporary Mexican food sold in the United States is reliant on pork, beef, and cheese, the indigenous people of Mexico knew nothing of pigs or cows until Europeans introduced them. These animals, along with Mediterranean foods such as wheat and grapes, were introduced to the Western Hemisphere and eventually became staples of the American diet. Another domesticated animal the European brought to the Americas, the horse, transformed the culture of the American Indians living in the plains region. Along with crops and livestock, the Europeans also brought with them vermin, such as mosquitoes and rats, adding to more environmental stresses to the American environment.

Conversely, European explorers took back Mesoamerican maize, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, peppers, and cacao to their home countries, where people started to grow them. Potatoes became so popular in Europe that they are often thought of as being native to certain regions, such as Ireland. The introduction of these vegetable crops caused tremendous population growth in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

People themselves also became part of the exchange. The arrival of enslaved Africans to the Americas brought biological and demographic changes. For example, Africans brought okra and rice with them to the Americas. As part of the Atlantic Ocean slave trade, tobacco and cacao produced on American plantations were sold to consumers in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Despite the fact that slave traders kidnapped millions of Africans from their homelands, populations actually grew in Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because of the nutritious foods that were introduced to the continent; yams and manioc, for example, were introduced to Africa from Brazil. (Test Prep: Write an outline of the effects of the Atlantic slave trade on Africa. See pages 323–327.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Columbian Exchange</th>
<th>Plants</th>
<th>Animals</th>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Technology/ Ideas</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>From Afro-Eurasia to the Americas</strong></td>
<td>Wheat, grapes, okra, sugar, rice, barley, oranges, lettuce, coffee</td>
<td>Pigs, cows, horses, oxen, chicken, sheep, goats, rats</td>
<td>Bubonic plague, typhus, influenza, measles, smallpox</td>
<td>Written alphabet, farming technology, firearms, architecture, corporate structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>From the Americas to Afro-Eurasia</strong></td>
<td>Potatoes, tomatoes, beans, peppers, yams, manioc, chocolate, tobacco, avocado, maize, squash, vanilla</td>
<td>Turkeys, llamas, alpacas, guinea pigs</td>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>Rubber, quinine</td>
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</table>
Economic Changes

The Western European search for profit began with Columbus. On his first voyage, he was convinced that gold was plentiful on Hispaniola, the name he gave the island now occupied by Haiti and the Dominican Republic. But gold was sparse in the Caribbean. Desiring to return home with something valuable, Columbus and his crew kidnapped Tainos and took them to Spain as slaves.

Coercive Labor In the early 1500s, the Spanish established a labor system called the encomienda to gain access to gold and other resources of the Americas. Encomenderos, or landowners, compelled indigenous people to work for them in exchange for food and shelter. This coercive labor system was notorious for its brutality and harsh living conditions.

Silver While gold did not yield riches for Spanish conquistadores, the discovery of silver in Mexico and Peru revived economic fortunes—for both individual explorers and Spain. The use of mercury to separate silver from its ore made silver mining more profitable. By the end of the sixteenth century, the cities of Zacatecas, in Mexico, and especially Potosí, in the Andes Mountains in modern-day Peru, became thriving centers of silver mining.

For this industry to flourish, Spanish prospectors needed labor. The indigenous populations would do all but the most dangerous work in the mines. In response, Spanish authorities in Peru transformed the traditional Incan mit’a system of labor obligation, in which young men were required to devote a certain amount of labor to public works projects, into a coerced labor system. Villages were compelled to send a percentage of their male population to do the dangerous work in the mines for a paltry wage.

The silver trade not only made individual Spanish prospectors wealthy, it also strengthened the Spanish economy. European powers at the time were adopting mercantilism, an economic system that increased government control of the economy through high tariffs and the establishment of colonies, claimed lands settled by immigrants from the home country. In the case of Spain, the main purpose of the colonies in the Americas was to supply as much gold and silver as possible. Another way to increase national wealth, according to the mercantilist system, was for a colonizing country to export more than it imported. A percentage of overseas silver production went directly to the Spanish crown. The empire used this wealth to build an impressive military and to establish trade with foreign lands.

Trade Across the Pacific China was a particularly enthusiastic consumer of this silver from the Western Hemisphere. Mexican silver, for example, made its way across the Pacific Ocean to East Asia in heavily-armed Spanish ships known as galleons that made stops in the Philippines. At the trading post in Manila, Europeans exchanged silver for luxury goods such as silk and spices, and even for gold bullion. The impressive Manila galleons allowed the silver trade to flourish. Indeed, the Chinese government soon began using silver as its main form of currency. By the early seventeenth century, silver had become a dominant force in the global economic system.
Sugar While Spain and Spanish America profited from silver, the Portuguese empire focused its endeavors on agriculture. Brazil, the center of the Portuguese-American empire, with its tropical climate and vast tracts of land, was perfect for sugarcane cultivation. As disease had decimated the indigenous population, however, there were not enough laborers available to do the cultivation. Moreover, many of the people who were forced to labor in the sugar fields escaped to the uncharted Brazilian jungle. In response, the Portuguese began to import enslaved people from Africa, especially from the Kongo Kingdom and cities on the Swahili coast.

Sugar’s profitability in European markets dramatically increased the number of Africans captured and sold through the transatlantic slave trade. Sugar cultivation in Brazil demanded the constant importation of African labor. African laborers were so numerous in Brazil that their descendants became the majority population of the region. Slaves often died from backbreaking working conditions, poor nutrition, lack of adequate shelter, and tropical heat and the diseases that accompanied such heat. Sugar plantations processed so much sugar that they were referred to as engenhos, which literally means “engines” in Spanish. Because of the engenhos’s horrible working conditions, plantation owners lost from 5 to 10 percent of their labor force per year. The Spanish noticed Portugal’s success with plantation agriculture and returned to the Caribbean to pursue cash crop cultivation, such as sugar and tobacco. Cash crops are grown for sale rather than subsistence. Soon, sugar eclipsed silver as the main moneymaker for the European empires. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph comparing the economic practices of Spain’s and Portugal’s colonial empires with later European imperialism. See pages 465–477.)

Political Changes

In the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century, the Aztec and Inca Empires collapsed relatively soon after the arrival of Europeans. (Test Prep: Write a brief outline of the Aztec and Inca Empires on the eve of the European conquests. See pages 258–264.)

The Fall of the Aztec Empire The Aztecs had accumulated numerous enemies throughout Mesoamerica as a result of the empire’s militaristic actions toward its neighbors. In 1519, Hernán Cortés and his small band of conquistadors easily exploited the divisions among Mesoamerica’s indigenous groups and marched on the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. The Aztecs offered Cortés gold to go away, but this gold made him even more determined. Helped by peoples that the Aztec ruled, Cortés’s forces conquered the Aztec by 1521. Smallpox also aided his victory. The disease swept through Tenochtitlán, killing thousands and weakening the Aztecs’ ability to defend their capital. Cortés quickly took control of the entire Aztec empire and founded the colony of New Spain. The Spaniards melted down the Aztecs’ treasures and sent the gold back home. They destroyed Tenochtitlán and built their own capital, Mexico City, on its ruins.

The Demise of the Inca Empire In 1532, Francisco Pizarro and his crew attacked the Inca in Peru and captured their ruler, Atahualpa. Pizarro
offered to release Atahualpa if the Inca would fill a large room with gold. The Inca complied, but in 1533 the Spanish killed Atahualpa anyway. By 1572, the Spaniards had completed their conquest of the Inca empire, which at its height had a population of 12 million. Some historians believe that European germs were more of a factor than guns and swords in drastically reducing the population of the Inca. The Spanish established a colonial capital in Lima, Peru, that administered lands from as far north as present-day Panama to as far south as Argentina.

**SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE COLONIES, C. 1600**

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**Other Regions of the Americas** In the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, Spain and Portugal divided the Americas between them, with Spain reserving all lands to the west of a meridian that went through eastern South America while Portugal reserved all lands east of this north-south line. This arrangement put Brazil under Portugal’s rule, while Spain claimed the rest of the Americas. In addition to establishing colonies in Mesoamerica and South America, Spain explored other parts of North America north of present-day Mexico. The explorer Pedro Menéndez de Avilés established a fort in St. Augustine on the
east coast of Florida in 1565, which became the oldest continuous settlement in what later became the United States. Spain would not be able to control all of North America, however, because the French, British, and Dutch later made claims and settlements there.

**Colonial Administration** Indigenous political structures in Latin America were soon replaced by Spanish and Portuguese colonial administrations. Spanish royalty appointed *viceroys* to act as administrators and representatives of the Spanish crown. To keep these viceroys from operating independently of the crown, Spain established *audiencias*, or royal courts, to which Spanish settlers could appeal viceroys’ decisions or policies. Slow transportation and communication networks between Europe and the Americas, however, made it difficult for the Spanish crown to exercise direct control over New Spain. As a result, the Spanish throne did not focus on the affairs of its colonies in the Western Hemisphere.

By 1750, those born in America of Spanish origin, or *creoles*, enjoyed political dominance in New Spain and soon began clamoring for independence from the Spanish throne. (Test Prep: In a brief paragraph or outline, trace the connections between creole elites and revolutions in Latin America. See pages 404–408.)

**Cultural and Social Changes**

Earlier land-based empires, such as those of the Romans, Muslims, and Mongols, all grappled with how to deal with conquered people’s traditions and cultures. These empires either allowed traditions to exist or they tried to graft their ways onto those of their subjects. European empires in the Americas stand in stark contrast to these land-based empires. The Spanish and Portuguese empires managed to erase the basic social structures and many of the cultural traditions of the indigenous Americans within a century of when the first European explorers arrived. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Europeans’ actions almost depopulated the Americas. (Test Prep: Create a two-column table comparing the Spanish and Portuguese maritime empires with earlier land-based empires. See pages 77–70, 146–155, and 241–248.)

**Cultural Changes** The indigenous peoples of the Americas lost a great deal of their culture and history at the hands of conquerors. Conquistadors, such as Cortés in Mexico, ordered the burning of native books, which were thought to be unholy. Thus, very few original accounts written in *Nahuatl*, the language of the Aztec, exist today.

The relative scarcity of firsthand accounts from indigenous peoples has played a major role in how historians view this time and place in history. For example, because the Spanish burned nearly all Aztec documents, very few original sources exist from the Aztecs themselves. Most of the information that historians have about the Aztec comes from documents that were written by Spanish conquistadores and priests after the conquest. The Spanish point of view shows clearly in these accounts; the authors’ biases and lack of familiarity with Nahuatl limits the value of these sources. However, there are some sources
that are still considered reliable. For example, in 1545, a Spanish priest named Bernardino de Sahagún began compiling the Florentine Codex, one of the most widely cited sources about Aztec life before and after conquest. (A codex is a type of book.)

Spanish and Portuguese conquerors transplanted their own languages and religion into the Americas. The remnants of this cultural interaction are present today; although indigenous languages thrive in certain regions, in Guatemala and in the mountains of Mexico, for example, Spanish predominates through much of Latin America and Brazilians overwhelmingly speak Portuguese.

Religion in Latin America Several Catholic religious orders in Europe, such as the Dominicans, Jesuits, and Franciscans, sent missionaries to Latin America to convert people to Christianity. The missionaries were so successful that today, most Latin Americans are Roman Catholic Christians. In recent decades, Protestant denominations have begun to gain more members.

Numerous examples of religious syncretism originated in the Spanish colonies. Catholic saints’ days that coincided with days honored by indigenous people were especially celebrated. In Mexico, a cult developed around the dark-complexioned Virgin of Guadalupe, who was revered for her ability to perform miracles. Meanwhile, certain syncretic religions developed that combined indigenous and Christian practices. Vodun, a descendant of West African animist traditions, is practiced mainly in Haiti and includes some elements of Catholicism. The religion is at times, often condescendingly, referred to as “voodoo.” Santería in Cuba shares many similarities with Vodun, combining Christianity and the traditions of the Aja people in Africa. Candomblé in Brazil combines Christianity with the traditions of the Yoruba from present-day Nigeria.

Social Changes Coupled with the arrival of Europeans was the importation of African slave labor. The combination of European settlers, imported Africans, and the conquered indigenous population led to the development of a new social hierarchy based on race and ancestry. At the top of the social pyramid stood the peninsulares, those who were born on the Iberian Peninsula. Next down the pyramid were the creoles, those of European ancestry who were born in the New World. Below these two groups were the castas, people of mixed-race ancestry. At the top of this group were mestizos, those of mixed European and indigenous ancestry, followed by mulattoes, those of mixed European and African ancestry, and zambo, those of mixed indigenous and African ancestry. Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans made up the bottom ranks of the hierarchy. Skin color became a signifier of power and status in many parts of the Americas. Thus, racial and ethnic background defined social status in the Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Western Hemisphere for centuries following the Europeans’ arrival.

The French Colonies

Spain’s rivals in Europe also explored and claimed regions in the Americas. French, English, and Dutch explorers all looked for a northwest passage—a route through or around North America that would lead to East Asia. In the
1500s and 1600s, the French government sponsored expeditions for that purpose. In 1535, for example, French explorer Jacques Cartier sailed from the Atlantic Ocean into the St. Lawrence River at today’s northern U.S. border. He did not find a new route to Asia, but he did claim part of what is now Canada for France. Eventually, explorers, such as Cartier and Samuel de Champlain (explored 1609–1616), realized that there were valuable goods and rich resources available in the Americas, so there was no need to go beyond to Asia.

Like the Spanish, the French hoped to find gold. Instead, they found a land rich in furs and other natural resources. In 1608, they established a town and trading post that they named Quebec. French traders and priests spread across the continent. The traders searched for furs; the priests wanted to convert Native Americans to Christianity. The missionaries sometimes set up schools among the indigenous peoples. In the 1680s, a French trader known as La Salle explored the Great Lakes and followed the Mississippi River south to its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico. He claimed this vast region for France.

Unlike the Spanish—or the English who were colonizing the East Coast of what is now the United States—the French rarely settled permanently. Instead of demanding land, they traded for the furs trapped by Native Americans. For this reason, the French had better relations with natives than did the Spanish or English colonists and their settlements also grew more slowly. For example, by 1754, the European population of New France, the French colony in North America, was only 70,000. The English colonies included one million Europeans.

The English Colonies

In 1497, the English king sent an explorer named John Cabot to America to look for a northwest passage. Cabot claimed lands from Newfoundland south to the Chesapeake Bay. The English, however, did not have enough sea power to defend themselves from Spanish naval forces—although English pirates called “sea dogs” sometimes attacked Spanish ships. Then in 1588, the English surprisingly defeated and destroyed all but onethird of the Spanish Armada. With that victory, England declared itself a major naval power and began competing for lands and resources in the Americas.

At about the same time the French were founding Quebec, the English were establishing a colony in a land called Virginia. In 1607, about one hundred English colonists traveled approximately 60 miles inland from the coast, where they built a settlement, Jamestown, on the James River. Both the settlement and the river were named for the ruling English monarch, James I. Jamestown was England’s first successful colony in the Americas, and one of the earliest colonies in what would become the United States. The first colonies in the present-day United States were Spanish settlements in Florida and New Mexico.

Early Challenges The London Company, a joint-stock company headquartered in England, owned Jamestown. In the hopes of making a profit, each English investor put up a portion of the money needed to fund the colony. Jamestown was not profitable at first, however; the colonists hoped to mine gold, but they found none. In addition, the town’s swampy location caused many of its settlers to fall sick and
die. Only food taken from the local Powhatan Indians kept the colony alive. The London Company replaced the deceased colonists by offering new settlers a free voyage to America.

_Tobacco_, a native plant grown by several tribes of American Indians, proved profitable for the colony. By 1620, the colonists were growing a high-quality tobacco in great demand in Europe, spurring the establishment of more plantations in other parts of Virginia. As colonists took land for farming, however, local Native Americans attacked them. Not until the 1640s was the colony able to establish peace with the local tribes.

**Servants and Slaves** The institution of _indentured servitude_ became widespread in the English colonies of North America. An indentured servant was someone who contracted to work for an employer without pay for a set number of years in exchange for passage to America. In fact, the first Africans brought to Virginia in 1619 came as indentured servants. Virginia laws changed later in the 1600s, resulting in the enslavement of the African American residents. Other southern colonies enacted similar laws. Indentured servitude remained much more common in the northern English colonies, while slavery became the norm in the southern colonies.

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**The Dutch Experience**

In 1609, the Dutch sent _Henry Hudson_ to explore the East Coast of North America. Among other feats, he sailed up what became known as the Hudson River to see if it led to Asia. He was disappointed in finding no northwest passage. But the Dutch used his voyage as the basis of claims to the Hudson River Valley and the island of Manhattan, where they set up a town called _New Amsterdam_. The Dutch used this port town as an important node in their
transatlantic trade network. Dutch merchants bought furs from trappers and tobacco from Virginia planters; those goods and others went to the Netherlands in exchange for manufactured goods. In 1664, the English military forced the turnover of New Amsterdam to the English. However, many Dutch settlers remained in Manhattan, and they kept the Dutch language for years to come.

**Environmental Impact** Contact between Afro-Eurasia and the Americas brought dramatic changes to both. Most changes resulted from the Columbian Exchange. In addition, though, Europeans used agricultural land more intensely than did American Indians. For example, colonists cut down trees to clear areas for planting crops, and they created large fields that they cultivated year after year. As a result, deforestation and soil depletion became problems in the Americas. In addition, Europeans often lived in more densely populated communities than did American Indians. This increased the strain on water resources and created more concentrated areas of pollution.

| **Comparing Transoceanic Voyages, c. 1300–c. 1800** |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| **Sponsoring Empire**       | **Explorer**                | **Key Voyages**             | **Purpose**                 | **Impact**                 |
| China                       | Zheng He                    | • India                     | To open up trade networks with India, Arabia, and Africa and to spread Chinese culture | China decided not to continue exploring |
|                            |                             | • Middle East               |                             |                             |
|                            |                             | • Africa                    |                             |                             |
| England                     | James Cook                  | • Australia                 | To collect botanical specimens, chart islands, and make astronomical observations | Europeans made contact with people in Australia and Hawaii, charted large areas of the Pacific, and mapped Newfoundland |
|                            |                             | • New Zealand               |                             |                             |
| Portugal                    | Vasco da Gama               | • West coast of Africa      | To open a sea route from Europe to India and China | Portugal expanded trade and cultural exchange between India and Europe |
|                            |                             | • India                     |                             |                             |
| Spain                       | Christopher Columbus        | • Caribbean islands         | To find a sea route to India and China going west from Europe | Spain led the European exploration and colonization of the Americas |
|                            |                             | • Central America           |                             |                             |
| Spain                       | Ferdinand Magellan          | • South America             | To demonstrate that Europeans could reach Asia by sailing west | Spain established links between the Americas and Asia across the Pacific Ocean |
|                            |                             | • Philippines               |                             |                             |
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: HOW HARSH WERE THE SPANISH?

After the first voyage of Christopher Columbus, Spanish conquistadors created a vast colonial empire in the Americas. In 1552, the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas described the greed, ruthlessness, and cruelty toward the native populations practiced by Spanish officials. Ever since, historians have debated the accuracy of his observations.

**Origins of the Black Legend** Writing in 1914, Spanish historian Julián Juderías labeled this belief in the evils of Spanish rule as the Black Legend. He argued that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europeans were jealous of Spanish wealth and power. As a result, they were prepared to believe the worst about Spain’s rule. Juderías suggested that historians focused so much on cruelty and bigotry that they ignored the positive achievements of Spanish colonialism.

**Debating the Black Legend** Besides jealousy, another factor entering into how historians viewed Spain was religion. During the centuries of struggle between Protestants and Catholics, the Black Legend fit with the negative views many Protestants had toward Catholics. In the United States, where Protestants dominated the writing of history in the nineteenth century, acceptance of the Black Legend was common.

In the first half of the twentieth century, many Spanish historians shared the perspective of Juderías. Their works reflected the intense national pride that many Spaniards felt about their past. In defending Spanish colonization, they developed what their critics called a “White Legend” to counter the Black Legend.

**Emphasis on Reform** One American historian active in the debate over Spanish colonization was Lewis Hanke. He argued against the Black Legend by trying to show that Las Casas was just one of many Spanish reformers. Through the efforts of these reformers, Hanke argued, the Spanish empire was “one of the greatest attempts the world has seen to make Christian precepts prevail in the relations between peoples.”

Defenders of the Black Legend thought Hanke had exaggerated the strength of Las Casas and the reformers, thereby making the Spanish look better than they were. Others emphasized that, despite any attempts at reform, what actually happened was harsh.

**The Global Context** In recent years, historians taking a more global approach to history have compared colonial empires more systematically than did previous historians. While they have noted clear differences among Europeans in the Americas, they have found widespread examples of brutality. Whether the Spanish were any worse than other Europeans remains hard to determine.
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Source: Adapted from Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*.

**KEY TERMS BY THEME**

**STATE-BUILDING**
- Christopher Columbus
- conquistadores
- colonies
- Aztec Empire
- Inca Empire
- Hernán Cortés
- New Spain
- Tenochtitlán
- Mexico City
- Francisco Pizarro
- Atahualpa
- Lima
- Treaty of Tordesillas
- viceroy
- audiencias
- Jacques Cartier
- Samuel de Champlain
- Quebec
- New France
- John Cabot
- Virginia

**ENVIROMENT**
- Jamestown
- Henry Hudson
- New Amsterdam

**CULTURE**
- Tainos
- Nahuatl
- *Florentine Codex*
- Virgin of Guadalupe
- Vodun
- Santeria
- Candomblé

**ECONOMICS**
- encomienda
- encomenderos
- mit’a system
- transatlantic slave trade
- engenhos
- cash crop
- London Company
- tobacco
- indentured servitude

**SOCIAL STRUCTURE**
- creoles
- peninsulares
- castas
- mestizos
- mulattoes
- zambos
MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Questions 1.1 to 1.3 refer to the passage below.

“The vivid scene of animals cavorting around the edge of lakes that once shimmered in Mexico City was painted by Aztec Indians in the early 1530s. . . . At the center of the 16-yard-long painting is a Christian cross in black and white, floating above a colorful, lively scene of fishermen, frogs, fish and other creatures. To the right of the cross and below it, the Indians painted an Ahuizotl, a mythical Aztec animal with paws resembling hands that was considered a servant or representative of the Aztec rain god, Tlaloc. To the left, there is a jaguar with a stylized plant on its back, upon which rests an eagle—a reference to pre-Hispanic place names and the kingdoms that ruled before the Spanish came. Indians also drew gracefully executed depictions of lakeside plants, some of which were used in traditional Aztec medicine.”

Mark Stevenson, newspaper story on an Aztec mural, 2006

1.1 Based on the excerpt, which statement best reflects the relationship between the Aztec and the Spanish in 1530?
(A) The Aztec remained isolated from the influences of Spanish culture.
(B) The Aztec maintained some of their culture in the face of Spanish influences.
(C) Many Aztecs were converted to Christianity by Spanish colonists.
(D) Elements of Aztec religion and culture were very similar to Christianity and Spanish culture.

1.2 Bartolomé de Las Casas probably would have reacted to this interpretation of the Aztec mural by pointing out that it
(A) reflected how Aztec culture emphasized harmony with nature
(B) omitted the atrocities committed by Europeans against the Indians
(C) included signs that Aztecs would eventually revolt against Europeans
(D) symbolized the conflict between Christianity and Aztec beliefs

1.3 What is the best description of the context in which the mural described in the passage was painted?
(A) Aztecs were building alliances with pre-Hispanic kingdoms.
(B) Aztecs were developing religious movements based on mythical Aztec animals.
(C) The Spanish in Mexico had recently conquered the Aztecs.
(D) The Spanish in Mexico were trying to preserve elements of traditional Aztec culture.
Questions 2.1 to 2.3 refer to the passage below.

“And so at the rumor of the rich deposits of mercury... in the years 1570 and 1571, they started the construction of the town of Huancavelica de Oropesa in a pleasant valley at the foot of the range. It contains 400 Spanish residents, as well as many temporary shops of dealers in merchandise and groceries, heads of trading houses, and transients, for the town has a lively commerce. ... Up on the range there are 3,000 or 4,000 Indians working in the mine. ... The ore was very rich black flint... and when they have filled their little sacks, the poor fellows, loaded down with ore, climb up those ladders or rigging, some like masts and others like cables, and so trying and distressing that a man empty-handed can hardly get up them.”

Antonio Vazquez de Espinosa, *Compendium and Description of the West Indies*, 1622

2.1 The excerpt implies that Espinosa felt
   (A) sympathy for those working in the mine
   (B) loyal to the Spanish government
   (C) concerned for the souls of the indigenous population
   (D) interested primarily in making profits from the mine

2.2 The system for using Indian labor described in the passage was most similar to the system of labor used
   (A) in ancient Egypt to build the pyramids
   (B) in the bureaucracy in Tang China
   (C) in early capitalism in Western Europe
   (D) by merchants the Trans-Saharan salt trade

2.3 What impact did the products of mines described in the passage, along with metals extracted from other mines, have on Spain and the rest of the world?
   (A) It enabled the Spanish navy to defeat the English navy in 1588.
   (B) It resulted in inflation and a worldwide devaluation of silver.
   (C) It caused gold to become the new form of worldwide currency.
   (D) It allowed many South Americans to move to Europe.
Questions 3.1 and 3.2 refer to the image below.

3.1 This painting probably represents a family in Latin America rather than one in British North America because Latin American families were more likely to
(A) have young children living with them
(B) wear formal clothing with lace
(C) consist of a European man and a native woman
(D) include a husband and a wife of similar ages

3.2 Why would the family portrayed in this painting have been rarer to find in a French colony than in other European colonies?
(A) The French developed worse relationships with Native Americans.
(B) French settlers were less likely to settle permanently in one place.
(C) The French had a strict ban on marriage with Native Americans.
(D) French settlers were usually females rather than males.
SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Answer parts A, B, and C.
   
   A. Other than geography, cite and explain ONE difference between British and French settlements in the Americas.
   
   B. Other than geography, cite and explain ONE difference between Spanish and Portuguese settlements in the Americas.
   
   C. Other than geography, cite and explain ONE difference between Dutch and French settlements in the Americas.

Question 2 refers to the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>European Voyages in Search of a Water Route to Asia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Answer parts A, B, and C.
   
   A. Cite ONE technological improvement that originated outside of Europe that Europeans learned to use, and explain how it helped them in their voyages of discovery.
   
   B. Select ONE of the explorers above and briefly explain how his voyage(s) affected the sponsoring empire beyond the impact listed in the chart.
   
   C. Select ONE explorer not selected in part B and briefly explain how his voyage(s) affected the indigenous population of the Americas.