

Chapter 1: The Collision of Cultures

Learning Objectives

- Describe the precontact peoples of the Americas.
- Explain how contact between European arrivals and the Indigenous peoples of the Americas affected both groups.
- Describe the English arrival in the Americas.

Chapter Overview

Many thousands of years before Christopher Columbus, humans migrated to the American continents and began to people them. In what today we refer to as South America and Central America, some formed elaborate civilizations. North America's many nomadic and seminomadic civilizations were less elaborate but still substantial. All would be dramatically affected by the arrival of Europeans. For these newcomers, the Americas meant a new source of gold and silver, new lands far from their homes to exploit for agriculture, and new converts to the Christian religion; for some, it also meant new lives as settlers and new freedoms. By the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, and England had all claimed rich resources in the Americas. They brought with them diseases against which Indigenous people had no immunity. It was not long before they also imported enslaved Africans.

Lecture Strategies

Reciprocal Relationships

An important theme to develop at the beginning of the course is the reciprocal relationship between Europe and the Americas. Lecturing on Spain and its American empire in the sixteenth century is an ideal way of emphasizing not only how Europe affected American development but also how the Americas affected European development. While colonization transformed the ecology, population, economy, and culture of regions that became Spanish America, the development of that colonial empire hastened the pace at which political authority in Europe became more centralized and economies in Europe became more monetarized and interdependent. The best source on the ecological impact of colonization is the work of Alfred Crosby, both *The Columbian Exchange* and *Ecological Imperialism*.

England in Ireland and America

England's first attempt at conquest, of course, took place in Ireland rather than the Americas. Chapter 1 discusses how the colonization of Ireland served as a model for the subsequent settlement of the Americas. In fact, many of the same men who served with the English army in Ireland were also involved in the earliest schemes for American colonization, lending to those designs their military—and often quasi-feudal—character. The Irish experience also shaped

subsequent relations between the English and the Indigenous peoples of Roanoke and the Chesapeake. The connection between Ireland and the Americas will probably be unfamiliar to most students, and its importance may warrant a lecture that addresses the differences and similarities of English colonization in Ireland and the Americas. Nicholas Canny's works, especially *Kingdom and Colony*, do an excellent job of describing the English conquest of Ireland and drawing comparisons between Ireland under English rule and early Jamestown.

Comparison of European Contact in the Americas and Africa

It could be helpful to point to the differences in the initial contact experience between Europeans and the peoples they encountered in the Americas and Africa. Generally, on the West African coast, the African kingdoms possessed enough military power to negotiate on a level of relative equality with the European explorers and traders. By contrast, the Tainos, whom the Spanish first encountered in the Caribbean, did not have the same capacities and were thus more easily dominated. Later, the Aztecs and Incas, while formidable warriors, found it difficult to fight the *conquistadores* because their power had been weakened by the outbreak of smallpox. In addition, both Aztecs and Incas were unpopular rulers and thus found it difficult to mobilize the peoples under their rule to come to their defense.

Teaching Suggestions

The Aztec Perspective on Spanish Conquest

On the issue of Indigenous attitudes toward invading Spaniards, an invaluable source is Miguel León-Portilla's *The Broken Spears*, which offers vivid accounts of the Spanish conquest set down by Aztec scribes. It also sheds light on the question of how the *conquistadores* succeeded in supplanting Aztec rulers by illustrating both the importance of Indigenous peoples' disunity and the catastrophic consequences of their first exposure to European diseases. Students should understand that although Spanish weaponry was important, it was not the deciding factor.

Motivations for Colonization

Students might also be asked to assess the relative importance of ideal, as opposed to material, goals in fostering colonization ventures. Most students are inclined to opt for the primacy of economic and political motives and tend to dismiss the colonizers' professed concerns for religion and social justice as legitimizers of baser incentives. Arguing against the grain of these inclinations can stir up some valuable exchanges that will lend complexity to their view of overseas enterprise. For an effective collateral reading that illustrates the ideals informing colonization, see Thomas More's *Utopia*. Discussion might also usefully emphasize the crusading mentality of the sixteenth-century Spanish and the militant Protestantism of the English, who felt a keen need to define themselves as something other than the "tyrannical" Spaniards of the "Black Legend." You may also want to introduce the attitudes of ordinary people in Europe toward colonization alongside those of the explorers and monarchs. How did they regard exploration and colonization? What stake might fisherfolk and peasants, sailors, and tradespeople have had in the opening of the Americas to Europe?

Points for Discussion

1. How did pre-Columbian Indigenous societies differ? How were they similar? What marked a highly developed society? Where were these societies found, and why were they located where they were?
2. What European so-called discoveries were made in the Americas before 1600? Which of these contributed to colonization and which did not? What contributed to the success or failure of these colonization efforts?
3. What did Indigenous American cultures contribute to the Europeans? Despite these contributions, why did the Europeans still think of Indigenous peoples as inferior?
4. What did the Europeans contribute to the Indigenous peoples? Given these contributions, why was European contact such a destabilizing force to Indigenous societies?
5. How were the Spanish and English motives for colonization different? How were they similar? How were these motives reflected in the organization of the colonies they established?
6. What was the social and cultural background of the Africans who were enslaved and brought to the Americas? How did this background differ from that of the Indigenous peoples and the Europeans? In what ways were the backgrounds of these people similar?
7. How did the Europeans use previous efforts at exploration and colonization when they went about colonizing the Americas?
8. It has often been said that European colonization of the Americas was motivated by “gold, God, and glory.” Is this an accurate shorthand interpretation of the motivation of all Europeans? Most Europeans? Some Europeans?
9. Discuss the factors that encouraged the development of the African slave trade and the evolution of that market among European participants.
10. Why did early English settlements in North America experience so much hardship? Did the French and Dutch fare better in their colonization efforts, or did they run into the same problems?

Map Exercises—Identification

1. Identify the patterns of early migration into North America.
2. Identify the principal subsistence patterns of early Indigenous peoples.
3. Identify the routes of exploration and the nations that sponsored these ventures.
4. Identify the locations of Spanish conquest and colonization.

Map Exercises—Interpretation

1. How did the geographic distribution and subsistence patterns of Indigenous peoples influence their cultural development?
2. European exploration and colonization affected Indigenous peoples in many ways. Considering where Europeans explored and planted settlements, which Indigenous cultures were affected most? How did initial exploration make it easier for future explorers (even from rival nations) to settle the area?
3. How did conditions in Europe help promote the exploration and settlement of the Americas? How does the location of American colonies reflect the geographic situation of the mother

- country? (Students may want to consult a world map for this question.)
4. Consider the location of principal Spanish cities. Which of these appear to have been established for trading purposes? For military (strategic or defensive) purposes? For both? How did the Spanish missions fit into this settlement scheme?

Map Exercises—Analysis

These questions are based on the preceding map exercises. They are designed to test students' knowledge of the geography of the area discussed in this chapter and of its historical development. Careful reading of the text will help students answer these questions.

1. In what ways did European exploration and colonization affect Indigenous peoples? In answering this question, note where Europeans explored and planted settlements. What cultural regions were affected most? Why was the impact of Europeans greater here? How did initial exploration make it easier for future explorers (even from rival nations) to settle the area?
2. What conditions existed in Europe that helped promote the exploration and settlement of the Americas? How did the geographic situations of European countries influence patterns of colonial settlement? (Students will want to consult a world map for help on this question.)