

In 1492, Columbus landed in the islands that are now called the West Indies. In later voyages, he claimed all the lands he visited for Spain. Columbus's voyages set Spain on a course of exploration and colonization in the Americas. Before long, Spain conquered and ruled a vast empire that included the West Indies, much of South America, Central America, Mexico, and other parts of North America. The Spanish conquests transformed the Americas and would have a huge impact on Europe, and even on distant lands in Asia.



>> *First Tribute to Columbus* (1892) by Spanish artist José Garnelo y Alda represents the first meeting with the Taíno. **Hypothesize** Do you think the encounter actually appeared like this? Why or why not?

 **Interactive Flipped Video**

# European Conquests in the Americas

## First Encounters

**The Taínos Meet Columbus** When Columbus first arrived in the West Indies in 1492, he encountered the **Taíno** (TY noh) people. The Taínos lived in villages and grew corn, yams, and cotton, which they wove into cloth. They were friendly and open toward the Spanish. Columbus noted that they were “generous with what they have, to such a degree as no one would believe but he who had seen it.”

Friendly relations soon evaporated. Columbus's men assaulted Taíno men and women, seized some to take back to the Spanish king, and claimed their land for Spain. The Spanish killed any Taínos who dared to resist. Columbus later required each Taíno to give him a set amount of gold. Any Taíno who failed to deliver was tortured or killed.

A wave of Spanish **conquistadors** (kahn KEES tuh dawrz), or conquerors, who soon arrived in the Americas repeated Columbus's encounter. They first settled on the islands of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Throughout the region, the conquistadors seized the Native Americans' gold ornaments and then made them pan for more gold. At the same time, the Spanish forced the Native Americans to convert to Christianity.

### >> Objectives

**Analyze** the results of the first encounters between the Spanish and Native Americans.

**Explain** how the Aztec and Inca empires were impacted by Spanish conquistadors and European colonization.

**Describe** how Portugal and other European nations challenged Spanish power.

**Analyze** the major features of Spanish colonial government, society and culture.

**Describe** the impact of Spanish colonization of the Americas.

### >> Key Terms

Taíno	mullatto
conquistador	privateer
immunity	
Hernán Cortés	
Tenochtitlán	
Malinche	
alliance	
Moctezuma	
Francisco Pizarro	
civil war	
viceroy	
encomienda	
Bartolomé de Las Casas	
peon	
peninsular	
creole	
mestizo	



>> After fighting with Tlaxcalans, Cortés and his men were welcomed into Tlaxcala. The Tlaxcalans became allies of the Spanish in the conflict with the Aztecs.

**Guns, Horses, and Disease** Although Spanish conquistadors only numbered in the hundreds as compared to millions of Native Americans, they had many advantages. Their guns and cannons were superior to the Native Americans' arrows and spears, and European metal armor provided them with better protection. They also had horses, which not only were useful in battle and in carrying supplies, but also frightened the Native Americans, who had never seen a horse.

Most important, an invisible invader—disease—helped the conquistadors take control of the Taínos and other Native Americans. Europeans unknowingly carried diseases, such as smallpox, measles, and influenza, to which Native Americans had no **immunity**, or resistance. These diseases spread rapidly and wiped out village after village. As a result, the Native American population of the Caribbean islands declined by as much as 90 percent in the 1500s. Millions of Native Americans died from disease as Europeans made their way inland.

**? DESCRIBE** How did Spanish conquistadors treat the Taínos?

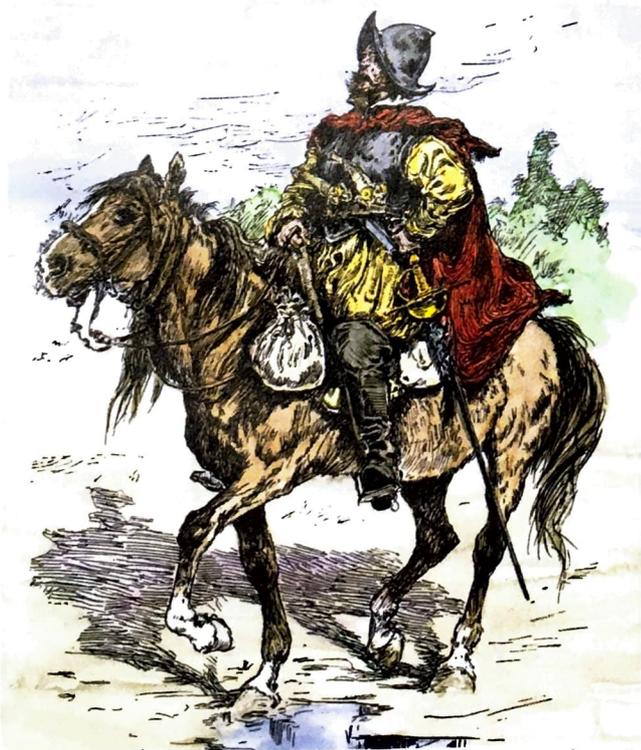
## Cortés Conquers the Aztecs

From the Caribbean, Spanish explorers probed the coasts of the Americas. From local peoples, they heard stories of empires rich in gold, but the first explorers also told about fierce fighters they had encountered. Attracted by the promise of riches as well as by religious zeal, a flood of adventurers soon followed.

**Cortés Arrives in Mexico** Among the earliest conquistadors was **Hernán Cortés**. Cortés, a landowner in Cuba, heard of Spanish expeditions that had been repelled by Indians. He believed that he could succeed where none had before. In 1519, he landed on the coast of Mexico with about 600 men, 16 horses, and a few cannons. He began an inland trek toward **Tenochtitlán** (teh nawch tee TLAHN), the capital of the Aztec empire.

A young Indian woman named **Malinche** (mah LEEN chay), called Doña Marina by the Spanish, served as his translator and advisor. Malinche knew both the Maya and Aztec languages, and she learned Spanish quickly.

Malinche told Cortés that the Aztecs had gained power by conquering other groups of people. The Aztecs sacrificed thousands of their captives to the Aztec gods each year. Many conquered peoples hated



>> A Spanish conquistador with his helmet, body armor, and sword rides on horseback in this hand-colored illustration from the 1800s.

## Cortés's Route, 1519



>> **Analyze Maps** Why do you think Cortés's ships sailed so close to the Mexican coast?

their Aztec overlords, so Malinche helped Cortés arrange **alliances** with them. They agreed to help Cortés fight the Aztecs.

**Moctezuma's Dilemma** Meanwhile, messengers brought word about the Spanish to the Aztec emperor **Moctezuma** (mahk tih ZOO muh). The Aztec ruler hesitated. Was it possible, he wondered, that the leader of the pale-skinned, bearded strangers might be Quetzalcoatl (ket sahl koh AHT el), an Aztec god-king who had long ago vowed to return from the East? To be safe, Moctezuma sent gifts of turquoise, feathers, and other goods with religious importance, but urged the strangers not to continue to Tenochtitlán.

Cortés, however, had no intention of turning back. He was not interested in the Aztec religious objects, but was extremely interested in the gold and silver ornaments that Moctezuma began sending him.

Cortés became more determined than ever to reach Tenochtitlán. Fighting and negotiating by turns, Cortés led his forces inland toward the capital. At last, the Spanish arrived in Tenochtitlán, where they were dazzled by the grandeur of the city.

**Cortés Takes Tenochtitlán** Moctezuma welcomed Cortés to his capital. However, relations between the Aztecs and Spaniards soon grew strained. The Spanish scorned the Aztecs' religion and sought to

convert them to Christianity. At the same time, as they remained in the city, they saw more of the Aztec treasure. They decided to imprison Moctezuma so they could gain control of the Aztecs and their riches.

Cortés compelled Moctezuma to sign over his land and treasure to the Spanish. In the meantime, a new force of Spanish conquistadors had arrived on the coast to challenge Cortés. In the confusion that followed—with various groups of Spanish, Aztecs, and Native Americans all fighting for control—the Aztecs drove the Spanish from the city. More than half of the Spanish were killed in the fighting, as was Moctezuma.

Cortés retreated to plan an assault. In 1521, in a brutal struggle, Cortés and his Native American allies captured and demolished Tenochtitlán. The Spanish later built Mexico City on the ruins of Tenochtitlán. As in the Caribbean, disease had aided their cause. Smallpox had spread among the Aztecs from the 1519 encounter, decimating the population.

**? IDENTIFY CAUSE AND EFFECT** Why did Cortés want to conquer the Aztecs?



>> Atahualpa, portrayed here by an unknown painter in the 1500s, was the thirteenth and last Incan ruler.

## The Incan Empire and Beyond

Cortés's success inspired other adventurers. Among them was Spaniard **Francisco Pizarro** (pee SAHR oh). Pizarro had heard rumors about a fabulously rich empire in Peru, with even more gold than the Aztecs. Pizarro arrived in Peru in 1532, just after the Incan ruler Atahualpa (ah tah WAHL puh) had won the throne from his brother in a bloody **civil war**. A civil war is fought between groups of people in the same nation. The war had weakened the Incas, and they had also begun to be affected by European diseases. In the end, however, it was trickery that helped Pizarro defeat the Incas.

**Atahualpa Resists** When Pizarro and his small force of about 200 men reached the Inca leader, they urged him to convert to Christianity and accept Charles V as sovereign. When Atahualpa refused, Pizarro tricked the Incan leader into meeting with him. Then with the help of Indian allies, he took the emperor prisoner and killed thousands of Incas.

For a time, the Spanish held Atahualpa captive. Pizarro's secretary described him as:

a man of thirty years, good-looking and poised, somewhat stout, with a wide, handsome, and ferocious face, and the eyes flaming with blood . . .

—Francisco de Xerez



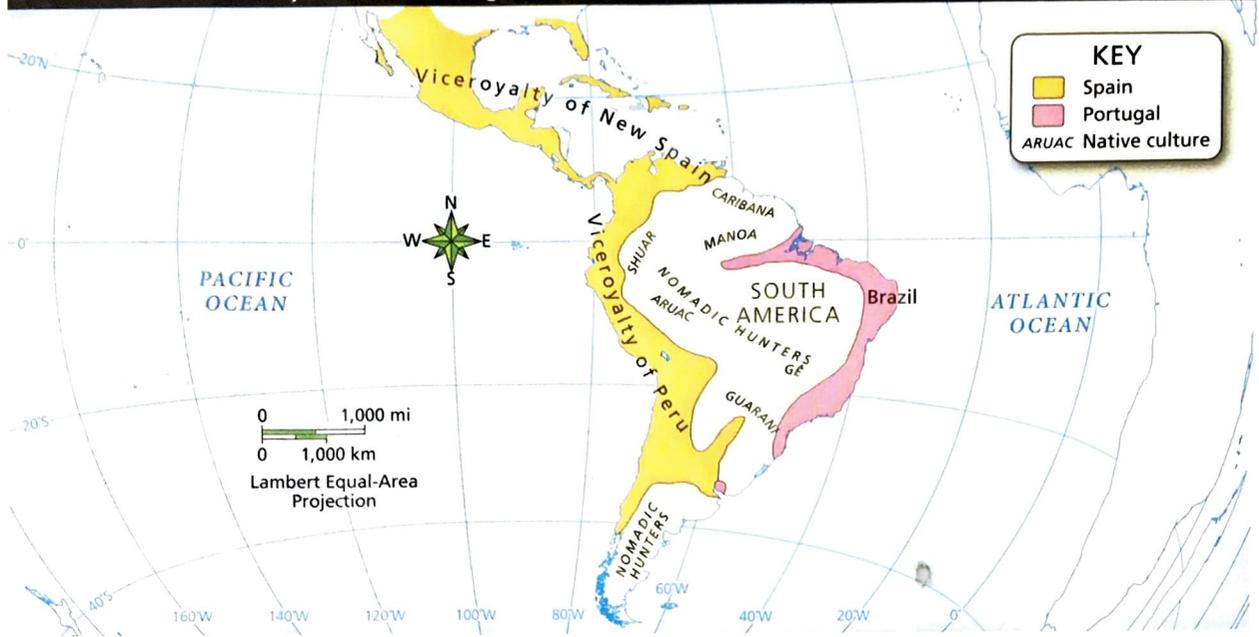
>> The conquistador Francisco Pizarro appears in full armor in this hand-colored woodcut from the 1800s.

**Pizarro Triumphs** Despite continuing resistance, Pizarro and his followers overran the Incan heartland. He had superior weapons, and the Incan people were weakened by European diseases. From Peru, Spanish forces surged across what are today Ecuador and Chile. Before long, Spain had added much of South America to its growing empire. Pizarro himself was killed by a rival Spanish faction a few years after he established the city of Lima.

**Beyond Spain's Empire** As in the Spanish empire, the Native Americans who lived in Brazil—the Tupian Indians—had been largely wiped out by disease. In the 1530s, Portugal began to issue grants of land to Portuguese nobles, who agreed to develop the land and share profits with the crown. Landowners sent settlers to build towns, plantations, and churches.

Unlike Spain's American colonies, Brazil offered no instant wealth from silver or gold. However, early settlers cut and exported brazilwood. The Portuguese named the colony after this wood, which was used to

## Spanish and Portuguese Colonies in the Americas, About 1700



>> **Analyze Maps** What do all the European land claims in South America have in common? Which country settled the easternmost region?

**Interactive Map**

produce a valuable dye. Soon they turned to plantation agriculture and raising cattle.

Like the Spanish, the Portuguese forced Indians and Africans to clear land for plantations. As many as four million Africans were sent to Brazil. As in Spanish America, a new culture emerged in Brazil that blended European, Native American, and African elements.

**Challenges to Portugal and Spain** In the 1500s, the wealth of the Americas helped make Spain the most powerful country in Europe, with Portugal not far behind. The jealous English and Dutch shared the resentment that French king Francis I felt when he declared, "I should like to see Adam's will, wherein he divided the Earth between Spain and Portugal."

To get around those countries' strict control over colonial trade, smugglers traded illegally with Portuguese and Spanish colonists. In the Caribbean and elsewhere, Dutch, English, and French pirates preyed on treasure ships from the Americas. Some pirates, called **privateers**, even operated with the approval of European governments. Other European explorers continued to sail the coasts of the Americas,

hunting for gold and other treasure, as well as a northwest passage to Asia.

**? COMPARE AND CONTRAST** How was Pizarro's treatment of the Incas similar to Cortés's treatment of the Aztecs?

## Governing the Spanish Empire

Spanish settlers and missionaries followed the conquistadors to the Americas. In time, the huge Spanish empire stretched from California in the north to Argentina in the south. Spain divided these lands into four provinces, including New Spain (Mexico) and Peru.

Spain imposed its culture, language, religion, and way of life on millions of new subjects in its empire. The Spanish built new Spanish-style cities on top of the ruins of Native American cities. "Christianizing" Native Americans, however, turned out to be more complex. In the end, though, Spain imposed its will by force.

**Royal Officials Rule the Provinces** Spain was determined to maintain strict control over its empire. To achieve this goal, the king set up the Council of the

Indies to pass laws for the colonies. He also appointed **viceroy**s, or representatives who ruled in his name, in each province. Lesser officials and *audiencias* (ow dee EN see ahs), or advisory councils of Spanish settlers, helped the viceroy rule. The Council of the Indies in Spain closely monitored these colonial officials to make sure they did not assume too much authority.

**Missionaries Spread Christianity** To Spain, winning souls for Christianity was as important as gaining land. The Catholic Church worked with the government to convert Native Americans to Christianity. Church leaders often served as royal officials and helped to regulate the activities of Spanish settlers. As Spain's American empire expanded, Church authority expanded along with it.

Franciscans, Jesuits, and other missionaries baptized thousands of Native Americans. They built mission churches and worked to turn new converts into loyal subjects of the Catholic king of Spain. They also introduced European clothing, the Spanish language, and new crafts such as carpentry and locksmithing. Where they could, the Spanish missionaries forcibly imposed European culture over Native American culture.

**Regulation of Trade** To make the empire profitable, Spain closely controlled its economic activities, especially trade. The most valuable resources shipped from Spanish America to Spain were silver and gold. Colonists could export raw materials only to Spain and could buy only Spanish manufactured goods. Laws forbade colonists from trading with other European nations or even with other Spanish colonies.

When sugar cane was introduced into the West Indies and elsewhere, it quickly became a profitable resource. The cane was refined into sugar, molasses, and rum. Sugar cane, however, had to be grown on plantations, large estates run by an owner or the owner's overseer. And plantations needed large numbers of workers to be profitable.

**Forced Labor: The Encomienda System** At first, Spanish monarchs granted the conquistadors **encomiendas** (en koh mee EN dahs), the right to demand labor or tribute from Native Americans in a particular area. The conquistadors used this system to force Native Americans to work under the most brutal conditions. Those who resisted were hunted down and killed. Disease, starvation, and cruel treatment caused drastic declines in the Native American population.

The encomienda system was used in the mines as well as on plantations. By the 1540s, tons of silver

**FORCED LABOR IN THE POTOSÍ SILVER MINES**

- 1 DISCOVERY**  
In 1545, a Native American found the silver mountain at Potosí, setting off a silver rush that peaked in the 1590s.
- 2 FORCED LABOR**  
From 1573 to 1812, the Spanish adapted *mita*, the Inca labor system, requiring all citizens to provide labor as tribute, to force Indians to mine silver.
- 3 CONDITIONS**  
Holding candles, miners descended on ladders hundreds of feet to dig and carry ore out.
- 4 ECONOMIC PROFITS**  
About two billion ounces of silver were taken from the Potosí mines. The Spanish used this silver to enrich Spain and to buy goods in China.
- 5 HUMAN COSTS**  
It is estimated that millions of miners died from terrible working conditions and accidents over hundreds of years.

>> While the process of extracting silver from the Potosí mines was terribly destructive for Native American and other forced laborers, it proved immensely profitable for Spain.

from the Potosí region of Peru and Bolivia filled Spanish treasure ships. Year after year, thousands of Native Americans were forced to extract the rich ore from dangerous shafts deep inside the Andes Mountains. As thousands of Native Americans died from the terrible conditions, they were replaced by thousands more.

**A Spanish Priest Condemns the Abuses** A few bold priests, like **Bartolomé de Las Casas** (bah roh loh MAY deh lahs KAHS ahs), condemned the evils of the *encomienda* system. In vivid reports to Spain, Las Casas detailed the horrors that Spanish rule had brought to Native Americans and pleaded with the king to end the abuse.

Prodded by Las Casas, Spain passed the New Laws of the Indies in 1542. The laws forbade enslavement and abuse of Native Americans, but Spain was too far away to enforce them. Many Native Americans were forced to become **peons**, workers forced to labor for a landlord in order to pay off a debt. Landlords advanced them food, tools, or seeds, creating debts that workers could never pay off in their lifetime.

**Bringing Workers from Africa** To fill the labor shortage, Las Casas urged colonists to import workers from Africa. He believed that Africans were immune to tropical diseases and had skills in farming, mining, and metalworking.

Las Casas later regretted that advice because it furthered the brutal African slave trade.

The Spanish began bringing Africans to the Americas as slave laborers by the 1530s. As demand for sugar products skyrocketed, the settlers imported millions of Africans as slaves. They were forced to work as field hands, miners, or servants in the houses of wealthy landowners. Others became skilled artists and artisans.

Within a few generations, Africans and their American-born descendants greatly outnumbered European settlers throughout the Americas. In the cities, some enslaved Africans earned enough money to buy their freedom. Others resisted slavery by rebelling or running away. You will learn more about slavery in the Americas in a later lesson.

**DEFINE** What was the *encomienda* system?



>> This Mexican painting from the 1700s shows a Spanish man with his Native American wife and their mestizo child, who is trying on a new pair of shoes.

## Society and Culture in Spanish America

In Spanish America, a diverse mix of peoples gave rise to a new society. The blending of Native American, African, and European peoples and traditions resulted in a culture distinct to the Americas.

**A Society of Unequal Classes** Spanish colonial society was made of distinct social classes. At the top were **peninsulares** (peh neen soo LAY rayz), people born in Spain. (The term *peninsular* referred to the Iberian Peninsula, on which Spain is located.) Peninsulares filled the highest positions in both colonial governments and the Catholic Church. Next came **creoles**, American-born descendants of Spanish settlers. Creoles owned most of the plantations, ranches, and mines.

Other classes stood lower in the social order and reflected the mixing of populations. They included **mestizos**, people of Native American and European descent, and **mulattoes**, people of African and European descent. Native Americans and people of African descent formed the lowest social classes.

**Thriving Towns and Cities** Spanish settlers generally lived in towns and cities. The population of Mexico City grew so quickly that by 1550 it was the largest Spanish-speaking city in the world. Colonial cities were centers of government, commerce, and European culture. Around the central plaza, or square, stood government buildings and a Spanish-style church. Broad avenues and public monuments symbolized European power and wealth. Cities were also centers of intellectual and cultural life. Architecture and painting, as well as poetry and the exchange of ideas, flourished in Spanish cities in the Americas.

**Educational Opportunities** To meet the Church's need for educated priests, the colonies built universities. The University of Mexico was established as early as 1551. A dozen Spanish American universities were already educating young men long before Harvard was founded in 1636 as the first college in the 13 English colonies.

Women desiring an education might enter a convent. One such woman was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (sawr HWAN uh ee NES deh lah krooz). Refused admission to the University of Mexico because she was female, Juana entered a convent at around the age of 18. There, she devoted herself to study and the writing of poetry.



>> Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a Catholic nun, appears at her desk in this painting from the 1700s by Miguel Cabrera. She defended women's right to learn and was recognized as an important writer.

She earned a reputation as one of the greatest poets ever to write in the Spanish language.

**A Blending of Cultures** Although Spanish culture was dominant in the cities, the blending of diverse traditions changed people's lives throughout the Americas. Settlers learned Native American styles of building, ate foods native to the Americas, and traveled in Indian-style canoes. Indian artistic styles influenced the newcomers. At the same time, Europeans taught their religion to Native Americans. They also introduced animals, especially the horse, thereby transforming the lives of many Native Americans.

Africans contributed to this cultural mix with their farming methods, cooking styles, and crops. African drama, dance, and song heightened Christian services. In Cuba, Haiti, and elsewhere, Africans forged new religions that blended African and Christian beliefs.

**?** **DRAW CONCLUSIONS** In Spanish colonial society, what determined a person's social rank?

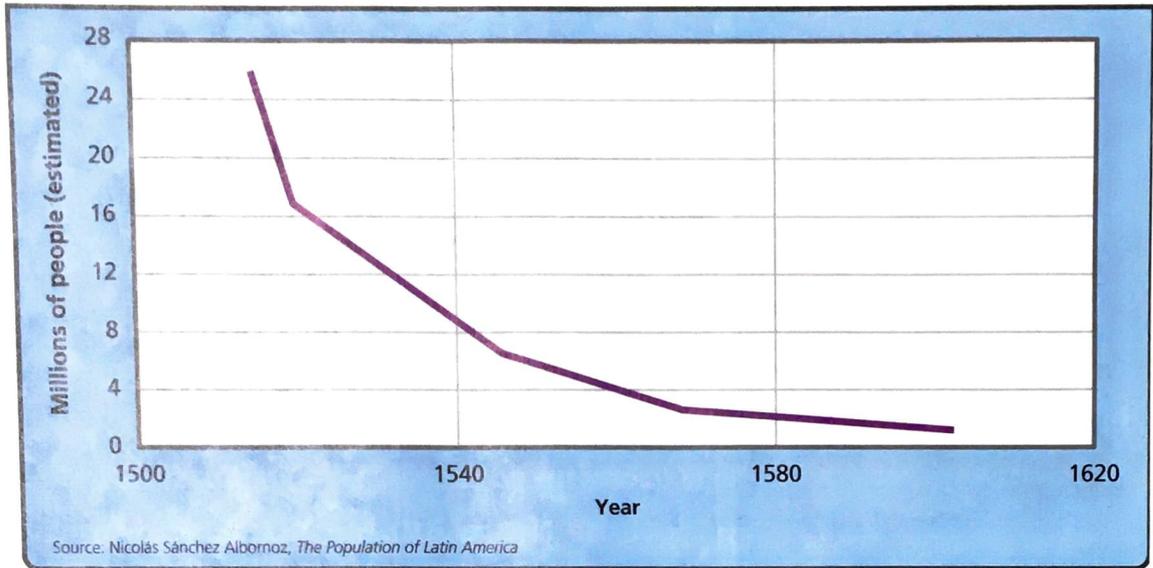
## The Impact of Spanish Colonization

Spanish exploration, colonization, and expansion had a long-lasting impact on Native Americans, Europeans, and others beyond these two groups. By establishing an empire in the Americas, Spain dramatically changed the pattern of global encounter first set in motion by European exploration of Africa's coasts. For the first time, much of the world was now connected by sea routes, on which traveled ships carrying goods, people, and ideas.

**Spain Wins Wealth and Power** In the 1500s, Spain acquired enormous wealth from its American colonies. Every year treasure fleets sailed to Europe loaded with gold and silver. These riches helped make Spain the most powerful country in Europe. At the same time, the French, English, and Dutch jealously eyed the Spanish treasure fleets and defied Spain's claims to the Americas.

**Native American Suffering and Resistance** The conquest of the Americas brought suffering and death to many Native American peoples. Although many converted to Christianity and adopted some Spanish ways, others resisted Spanish rule for centuries. For centuries, the Maya fought Spanish rule in Mexico and Central America. Long after the death of Atahualpa, revolts erupted among the Incas.

## Native American Population of Central Mexico



>> **Analyze Graphs** What is the estimated population decline between 1519 and 1540? How does it compare with the population change between 1540 and 1580? Why?



Resistance did not always take the form of military action. Throughout the Americas, Native Americans resisted Europeans by preserving their own cultures, languages, religious traditions, and skills, such as weaving and pottery. As you will read later, European exploration and colonization had tremendous global impact even beyond the Americas by connecting people, goods, and ideas around the world.

**? DESCRIBE** In what ways did Native Americans resist European influence?

### ASSESSMENT

1. **Identify Patterns** Describe the common effects of the first encounters between the Spanish and Native Americans in Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere.

2. **Draw Conclusions** Why were Native Americans unable to defeat the Spanish conquistadors?
3. **Identify Main Ideas** Describe the main characteristics of government, religion, and economics in Spain's colonies in the Americas.
4. **Categorize** Explain how the people of Spanish colonial society were categorized into different social classes.
5. **Predict Consequences** How do you think other European nations will threaten Spanish and Portuguese power in the Americas?