

AGE OF EXPLORATION

The context: European discoveries, conquests, and settlements throughout the world from 1400 to 1700 C.E. explain why the era is famously known as the Age of Exploration. Many of the individuals who accomplished these feats of adventure and exploration, including Columbus, Magellan, and Cortes, have names that are as recognizable as any in the history of the world. Continents, countries, and cities are named after many of these men whose actions changed the world permanently. While their efforts and successes are still celebrated by modern society, the overall impact of those voyages, contacts, and conflicts have created a divided view of their cultural and historical legacy.

Should the European explorers, conquistadors, and settlers from the Age of Exploration still be glorified and celebrated in modern times?

Those that support the celebration of these explorers tend to point to the benefits of cultural diffusion in terms of knowledge, skills, and technology, as well as ideas and religion. The opposing viewpoint tends to argue that the benefits of exploration were one-sided and came at a heavy cost, that the explorers/conquerors were greedy and cruel, and that European settlement led to the destruction of native culture and populations.

YOUR TASK: To answer the above question, you must read the following excerpts from important sources and answer the corresponding questions. **YOU ARE REQUIRED TO USE SPECIFIC INFORMATION FROM AT LEAST 4 OF THE 10 SOURCES.** Once you have done this, you will take a position on the issue and write an essay using these sources as well as examples from what you have learned in class. You will also want to use examples from your class resources to help you support your position and arguments. If you only use information from these documents, you will not have adequately supported your ideas!

Document 1: Bernal Diaz, The True History of the Conquest of New Spain

Bernal Díaz del Castillo was a Spanish conquistador, who participated as a foot soldier in the conquest of Mexico with Hernán Cortés.

Let us state how most of the Indian natives have successfully learned all the Spanish trades... There are gold and silversmiths... and carvers also do the most beautiful work with iron tools... Many sons of chieftains know how to read and write, and to compose books... Now they breed cattle of all sorts, and break in oxen, and plough the land, and sow wheat, and thresh harvest, and sell it, and make bread, and they have planted their lands with all the trees and fruits, such as apples and pears which they hold in higher regard than their native plants, which we have brought from Spain.

1.1 *To what extent does this passage portray the concept of cultural diffusion?*

1.2 *What was the effect of European conquest on native populations?*

Document 2: Hernán Cortés, Excerpt of Letter to Charles V

Cortés was a Spanish Conquistador who led an expedition that caused the fall of the Aztec Empire and brought large portions of mainland Mexico under the rule of the King of Castile in the early 16th century. Cortés was part of the generation of Spanish colonizers who began the first phase of the Spanish colonization of the Americas.

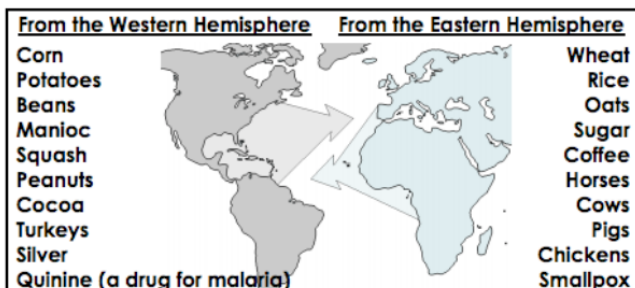
They have a custom, horrible, and abominable, and deserving punishment... Whenever they ask anything of their gods, in order for their request to be fulfilled, they take many boys, girls, men, and women, and in the presence of the statues of their gods they cut open their chests. While they are still alive they take out their hearts and entrails. Then they burn the organs, offering the smoke as a sacrifice to their gods... No year passes in which they do not kill and sacrifice 50 souls at each temple in their kingdom... I did everything I could to steer them away from their false gods and to draw them to our Lord God. Montezuma agreed that I probably knew best... He said that as long as I taught the Aztecs our religion they would follow my directions. Therefore, I removed the statues of the false gods, cleaned the temples, and taught the people our religion. The rest of the Aztecs did not accept the new religion that I was giving them. They did make sure, though, that they did not sacrifice any more humans while I was in the city...

2.1 What was the purpose of human sacrifice in the Aztec religion?

2.2 What did Cortes do to end the practice of human sacrifice?

Document 3: William Duiker and Jackson Spielvogel. “The Columbian Exchange” as found in World History.

The European expansion into the Americas began the exchange of plant and animal species that have ultimately been of widespread benefit to peoples throughout the globe. The introduction of the horse, cow, and various grains vastly increased food productivity in the Americas. The cultivation of corn, manioc, and the potato, all products of the Americas, have had the same effect in Asia, Africa, and Europe. The “Columbian Exchange,” as it is sometimes called, was a process that ultimately brought benefits to all peoples.



3.1 How did Europeans and Native Americans benefit from the Columbian Exchange?

Document 4: Christopher Farman “The Ocean Adventurers,” found in *Voyages of Discovery*, 1989

Portugal was the first country in which the new spirit of curiosity had practical results in terms of exploration. The Portuguese had many motivations to explore. They certainly had a desire for knowledge, but they were also searching for wealth through trade. A nobler purpose was the belief that it was their duty to bring Christianity to distant lands. One Portuguese who stands out for his accomplishments is Magellan. Magellan achieved what Columbus first suggested: connecting Europe with Asia by sailing west. The last great unknown ocean had been crossed. The world itself stood revealed. Much remained to be mapped, but an outline was in place for future generations to fill in. The explorers of the fifteenth century and early sixteenth centuries did not set out to make a revolution in knowledge, but that is what they achieved. The Portuguese not only ended the isolation of Europe; they also set it on the path to worldwide expansion. Their voyages of discovery stand at the very beginning of the world’s first global culture.

4.1 To what extent did the Portuguese reflect Western values associated with the Renaissance spirit?

Document 5: Arthur M. Schlesinger in *Columbus on Trial* , 1992

European culture, like any other large-scale civilization, has produced its share of monsters and atrocities, but other civilizations in their conquests did not show anything like the concern for moral behavior and treatment of others that Europe did in theory if not always in fact. As Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has rightly pointed out: Whatever the particular crimes of Europe, that continent is also the source—the unique source—of the liberating ideas of the individual liberty, political democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and cultural freedom that constitute our most precious legacy and to which most of the world today aspires. In fact, it was precisely the contact with Americas that stimulated Europe to develop further some of the principles we take for granted today as constituting the basic minimum of human rights and proper international conduct.

5.1 What is the connection between exploration and the development of human rights both in Europe and the Americas?

Document 6: Geoffrey Cowley in the *Great Disease Migration*

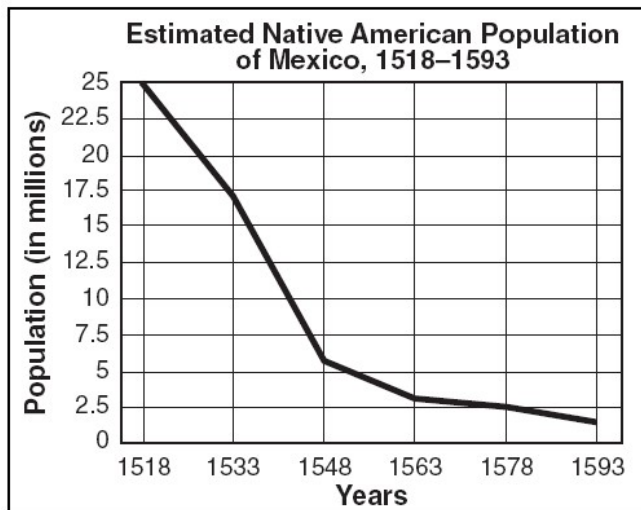
Many experts now believe that the New World was home to 40 million to 50 million people before Columbus arrived and that most of them died within decades. In Mexico alone, the native population fell from roughly 30 million in 1519 to 3 million in 1568.

There was similar devastation throughout the Caribbean islands, Central America and Peru. The eminent Yale historian David Brion Davis says this was “the greatest genocide in the history of

man.” Yet it’s increasingly clear that most of the carnage had nothing to do with European barbarism. The worst of the suffering was caused not by swords or guns but by germs.

By the time Columbus set sail, the people of the Old World held the distinction of being thoroughly diseased. By domesticating pigs, horses, sheep and cattle, they had infected themselves with a wide array of germs. And through centuries of war, exploration, and city-building, they had kept those agents in constant circulation. Virtually any European who crossed the Atlantic during the 16th century had battled such illness as smallpox and measles during childhood and emerged fully immune.

By contrast, the people of the Americas had spent thousands of years in biological isolation. By the time Columbus had arrived, groups like the Aztecs and Maya of Central America and Peru’s Incas had built cities large enough to sustain major epidemics.



Source: James Killoran et al., *The Key to Understanding Global History*, Jarrett Publishing (adapted)

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Archeological evidence suggests they suffered from syphilis, tuberculosis, a few intestinal parasites and some types of influenza. Yet they remained untouched by the diseases that had raged for centuries in the Old World. When the newcomers arrived carrying mumps, measles, whooping cough, smallpox, cholera, gonorrhea and yellow fever, the Indians were immunologically defenseless.

6.1 Why were the Native Americans particularly vulnerable to European diseases?

Document 7: Miguel León-Portilla *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, 2006

[After the Spaniards fled Tenochtitlan after La Noche Triste, a great plague broke out here in Tenochtitlan.] It began to spread during [the month of October] and lasted for seventy days, striking everywhere in the city and killing a vast number of our people. Sores erupted on our faces, our breasts, our bellies; we were covered with agonizing sores from head to foot. The illness was so dreadful that no one could walk or move. The sick were so utterly helpless, they could only lie on their beds like corpses, unable to move their limbs or even their heads. They could not lie face down or roll from one side to the other. If they did move their bodies, they screamed with pain. A great many died from this plague and many others died of hunger. They could not get to search for food and everyone else was too sick to care for them, so they starved to death in their own beds. ... Their looks were ravaged, for wherever a sore broke out, it gouged an ugly pockmark in the skin. And a few of the survivors were left completely blind. The first cases were reported outside of the

city. By the time the danger was recognized, the plague was so well established that nothing could halt it and spread to all of the region around Lake Texcoco. Then its virulence diminished considerably, though there were many isolated cases for many months after. The very first victims were stricken during [early September] and the faces of our warriors were not clean and free of sores until [the end of November].

7.1 What were the effects of smallpox on the population of Tenochtitlan?

7.2 What was the effect of conquest and settlement on the total population of native civilizations?

7.3 To what extent did these effects impact the society and culture of Native Americans?

Document 8: “Indians in Latin America,” found in The World Book

During the early 1500’s, Spain established the *encomienda* system in Latin America. Under this system, the Spanish king granted colonists the right to collect payments from Indians living in certain areas of land. The Spanish landowners forced the Indians to farm the land or work in mines. Eventually, the colonists claimed to own the land. Thousands of Indians died from overwork and harsh treatment. Spanish threats to Indian ways of life were not limited to forcing them to work for the colonists’ benefit. The Spaniards also weakened traditional tribal bonds by resettling individual members of tribes far apart so that they would have little contact with one another. In some cases, Indians were moved to specially designed villages where they would be forced to give up their customs so they could be taught Christianity and European customs and manners. During their rule in Latin America, the Spaniards also created a class structure based on race. In general, the Spaniards and their children were the highest class. Mestizos (people of Indian and Spanish descent) and mulattoes (people of African and Spanish ancestry) formed the next class. The lowest class was made up of African slaves and Indians.

*8.1. Explain how the Spanish benefitted from the *encomienda* system?*

8.2 What was Spanish colonization like for the natives and other non-Europeans?

Document 9: The Oral History of Chief Hatuey, 1512

As a witness of the atrocities of the Spanish conquistadors against the Taino Indians, Chief Hatuey rounded up his people and fled to another island. He was finally captured and sentenced to burn at the stake for having organized an uprising against the Spanish. A Spanish monk who was present on the day of the execution attempted to convert him to Christianity. The friar explained to the chief about conversion, baptism, and the Catholic concept of heaven and hell. He offered to baptize Chief Hatuey. The chief requested some time to think about the offer. After a few moments he gave his legendary response. Hatuey first asked the monk, "After being baptized, where does one go after death?" The monk responded, "To Heaven." The chief then asked, "And where do the Spanish go after death?" The monk replied, "If they are baptized, they will also go to heaven like all Christians." Then the chief bravely responded "If the Spaniards go to heaven, then I certainly do not want to go there. Do not baptize me, I would prefer to go to hell!"

9.1 What was Chief Hatuey's attitude toward the Spanish?

Document 10: Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies*, 1542.

Of all the people of the world, the Indians are naturally the most patient and peaceful. They hold no grudges and do not start fights. Because they are so weak and willing to please others, though, they are unable to endure heavy labor and soon die of some disease. They are also poor, possess very little, and have no desire to own more. For this reason they are not greedy. They are very clean, with intelligent minds. They are ready and willing to learn, so it is very likely they will accept our Catholic religion and our virtuous customs. Yet into these sheep came some Spaniards who immediately behaved like wild wolves. The Spaniards killed and terrorized the native peoples in order to gain more gold and to make themselves richer. With their horses and metal weapons, the Spaniards began to carry out massacres and strange cruelties against Indians. For example, they made bets as to who could split a man in half or could cut off his head or spill out his entrails with a single swing of a sword or pike. They took infants by the legs and pitched them headfirst against rocks or by the arms and threw them into the river, roaring with laughter the whole time. They made some gallows where they hanged victims with their feet almost touching the ground ... then set burning wood just under their feet and burned them alive. The few survivors, if there were any, would then be divided up by the conquistadors to be slaves.

10.1 How did de las Casas view the Native Americans?

10.2 Why does he use the phrase "wild wolves" to describe the Spanish?
