

# Spain's Empire in the Americas

## MAIN IDEA

Throughout the 1500s and 1600s, the Spanish conquered Central and portions of North America.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Spanish language, religion, and architecture continues to influence the Americas.

## Terms & Names

- Hernándo Cortés
- conquistador
- New Spain
- mestizo
- encomienda
- Juan Ponce de León
- New Mexico
- Popé



In 1519, the native world near Tabasco in southeastern Mexico changed forever. That year, **Hernándo Cortés** led an army into the American mainland, eager to claim new lands for Spain. The peoples of the Tabasco, a province of the mighty Aztec empire, resisted the invaders but were no match for the Spaniards' rifles and cannons.

In surrendering, the natives handed over to the Spaniards 20 women, one of whom came to be called Doña Marina, or Malinche. Malinche easily mastered the Spanish language and soon acted as both translator and guide for Cortés as he fought and negotiated his way through Mexico. She also proved to be a brave and daring warrior. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, one of Cortés's foot soldiers, noted Malinche's courage.



▲ Malinche (center) translates for the Spaniards and the Aztec.

### ★ A PERSONAL VOICE BERNAL DÍAZ DEL CASTILLO

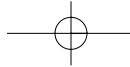
“Doña Marina . . . possessed such manly valor that, although she had heard every day how the Indians were going to kill us and eat our flesh with chili, and had seen us surrounded in the late battles, and knew that all of us were wounded or sick, yet never allowed us to see any sign of fear in her, only . . . courage.”

—quoted in *Notable Latin American Women*

Malinche played a key role in the early stages of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. As the first European settlers in the Americas, the Spanish greatly enriched their empire and left a mark on the cultures of North and South America that still exists today.

## The Spanish Claim a New Empire

In the wake of Columbus's voyages, Spanish explorers took to the seas to claim new colonies for Spain. Lured by the prospect of vast lands filled with gold and silver, these explorers, known as **conquistadors** (conquerors), pushed first into



the Caribbean region—the islands and coast of Central and South America along the Caribbean Sea. Then they swept through Mexico and south to the tip of South America.

**CORTÉS SUBDUES THE AZTEC** Soon after landing in Mexico, Cortés learned of the vast and wealthy Mexica, or Aztec, empire, located deep in the region’s interior. The Aztec, members of the diverse Nahua peoples of central Mexico, dominated the region. Cortés set off to conquer the Aztec with a force of 600 soldiers, 17 horses, numerous dogs, and 10 cannons. As he marched inland, Cortés, a gifted diplomat as well as military leader, convinced those Nahua who had long resented the spread of Aztec power to join his ranks.

After marching for weeks through 200 miles of difficult mountain passes, Cortés and his legions finally looked on the magnificent Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. The Spaniards marveled at Tenochtitlán, with its towering temples and elaborate engineering works—including a system that brought fresh water into the city. “We were amazed,” Bernal Díaz said of his first glimpse of Tenochtitlán. “Some of our soldiers even asked whether the things we saw were not a dream.” While the Aztec city astonished the Spaniards, the capital’s glittering gold stock seemed to hypnotize them. “They picked up the gold and fingered it like monkeys,” one Native American witness recalled. “They hungered like pigs for that gold.” **A**

Convinced at first that Cortés was an armor-clad god, the Aztec emperor Montezuma agreed to give the Spanish explorer a share of the empire’s existing gold supply. Cortés, who admitted that he and his comrades had “a disease of the heart that only gold can cure,” eventually forced the Aztec to mine more gold and silver. In the spring of 1520, the Aztec rebelled against the Spaniards’ intrusion. It is believed that, before driving out Cortés’s forces, the Aztec stoned Montezuma to death, having come to regard him as a traitor.

While they successfully repelled the Spanish invaders, the natives found they could do little to stop disease. By the time Cortés launched a counterattack in 1521, the Spanish and their native allies overran an Aztec force that was greatly reduced by smallpox and measles. After several months of fighting, the invaders finally sacked and burned Tenochtitlán, and the Aztec surrendered. **B**

**A Native American depiction of Aztec archers battling Cortés’s troops**

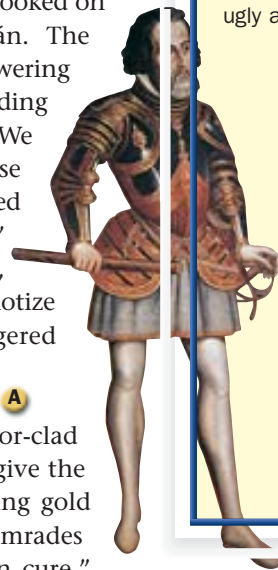
## KEY PLAYER

HERNÁNDO CORTÉS  
1485–1547

Cortés made himself the enemy of thousands of Native Americans, but the daring conquistador had few friends among Spaniards either. Spanish authorities on Cuba, where Cortés owned land, accused the conquistador of murdering his wife, Catalina Juárez. “There were ugly accusations, but none proved,” wrote Juárez’s biographer.

In addition, the Cuban governor, Diego Velázquez, who resented Cortés’s arrogance, relieved him of the command of a gold-seeking expedition to the mainland. Cortés left Cuba anyway.

As he fought his way through Mexico, Cortés had to battle not only the Native Americans, but also the Spanish forces that Velázquez had sent to arrest him.



**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Motives**

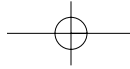
**A** Why was Cortés interested in the Aztec empire?

**MAIN IDEA**

**Summarizing**

**B** What factors enabled the Spaniards to conquer the Aztec?





While flames still flickered in the shattered capital, Cortés laid plans for the colony of **New Spain**, whose capital he called Mexico City. Within three years, Spanish churches and homes rose from the foundations of old native temples and palaces in Mexico City. Cathedrals and a university followed.

**SPANISH PATTERN OF CONQUEST** In building their new American empire, the Spaniards drew from techniques used during the reconquest of Spain from the Moors, a Muslim people from North Africa who had occupied Spain for centuries.

When conquering the Moors in the late 1400s, the Spanish lived among them and imposed upon them their Spanish culture.

Spanish settlers in the Americas were mostly men and were known as *peninsulares*. Marriage between peninsulares and native women was common. These marriages created a large **mestizo**—or mixed Spanish and Native American—population. Their descendants live today in Mexico, other Latin American countries, and the United States.

Although the Spanish conquerors lived among and intermarried with the native people, they also oppressed them. In their effort to exploit the land for its precious resources, the Spanish forced the native workers to labor within a system known as **encomienda**, in which the natives farmed, ranched, or mined for Spanish landlords, who had received the rights to their labor from Spanish authorities.

The harsh pattern of labor that emerged under the *encomienda* caused priests such as Antonio de Montesinos to demand its end in a sermon delivered in 1511.

*“You and your people, . . . entering with such speed and fury into my country, . . . as to strike terror into our hearts.”*

**NATIVE AMERICAN CHIEF, TO SPANISH EXPLORER HERNANDO DE SOTO**

**A PERSONAL VOICE** FRAY ANTONIO DE MONTESINOS

**“Tell me, by what right or justice do you hold these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? . . . Why do you keep them so oppressed and exhausted, without giving them enough to eat or curing them of the sicknesses they incur from the excessive labor you give them? . . . Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves? Don’t you understand this? Don’t you feel this?”**

—quoted in *Reflections, Writing for Columbus*

In 1542, the Spanish monarchy, which had tried to encourage fair treatment of native subjects, abolished the *encomienda*. To meet their intense labor needs, the Spaniards instead turned to other labor systems and began to use African slaves. **C**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Causes**

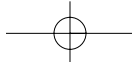
**C** Why did the Spanish begin to use African slaves on their plantations in the New World?

**The Conquistadors Push North**

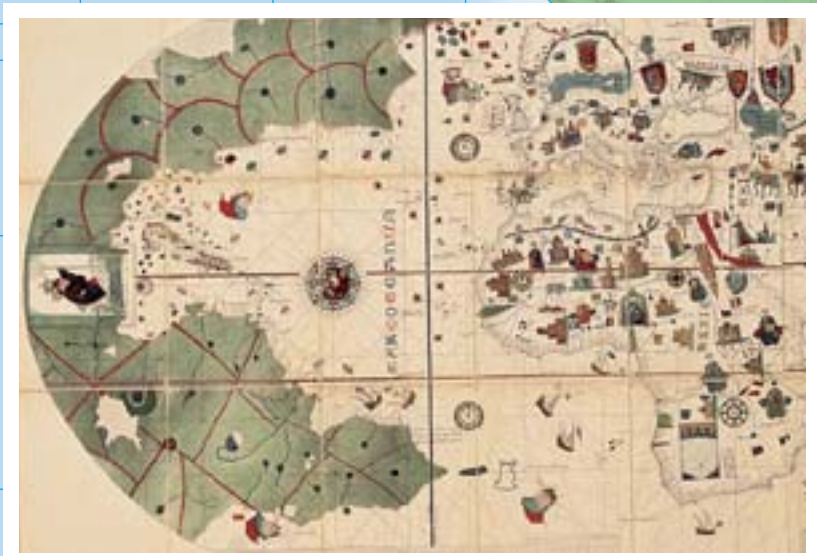
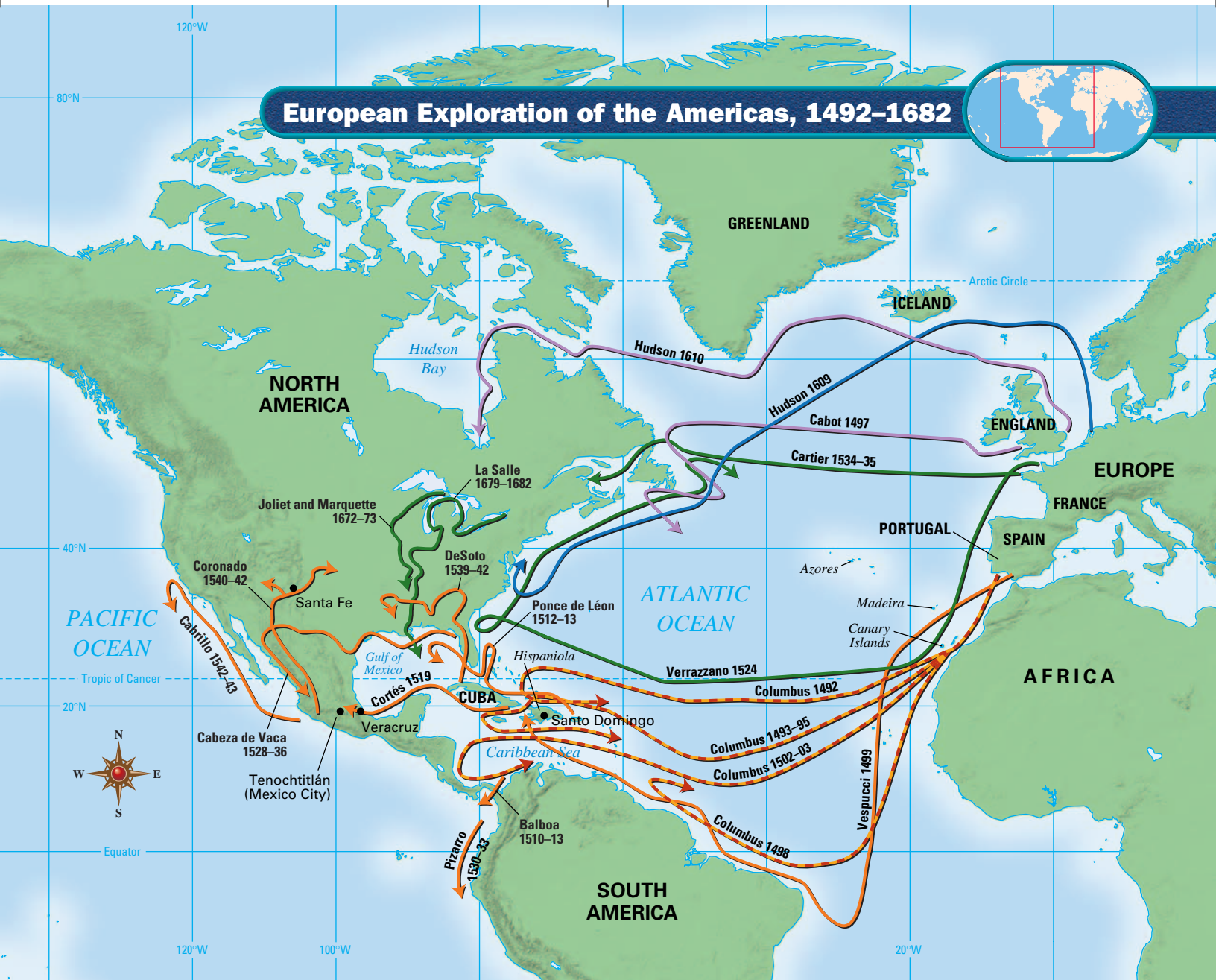
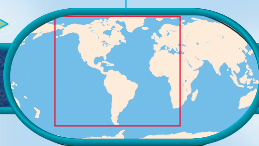
Dreaming of new conquests and more gold, and afraid that European nations might invade their American empire from the north, Spain undertook a series of expeditions into what would become the southeastern and southwestern United States.

**EXPLORING FLORIDA** In 1513, on Easter Sunday—a day the Spaniards called *pascua florida*, or “feast of flowers”—explorer **Juan Ponce de León** spied a tree-covered beach. In honor of the holiday, he named the land *La Florida*. For almost five decades, the Spanish probed La Florida and the surrounding areas for gold, battling the local residents, disease, and starvation. In 1562, discouraged by the lack of economic success, Spain abandoned further exploration of Florida.

Within months of Spain’s departure, a band of French settlers arrived near what is now Jacksonville. Accompanying the settlers were French pirates, or buccaneers, who quickly took interest in Spain’s treasure-filled ships sailing from the Gulf of Mexico. Consequently, Spain reversed its decision to abandon Florida and ordered one of its fiercest warriors, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, to drive the French out of the area.



# European Exploration of the Americas, 1492-1682



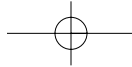
Juan de la Cosa, pilot-navigator on Columbus's ship *Niña*, drew the known world on this oxhide map in 1500.

→ Spanish  
→ Columbus  
→ French  
→ English  
→ Dutch

0 1,000 2,000 miles  
 0 1,000 2,000 kilometers

### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

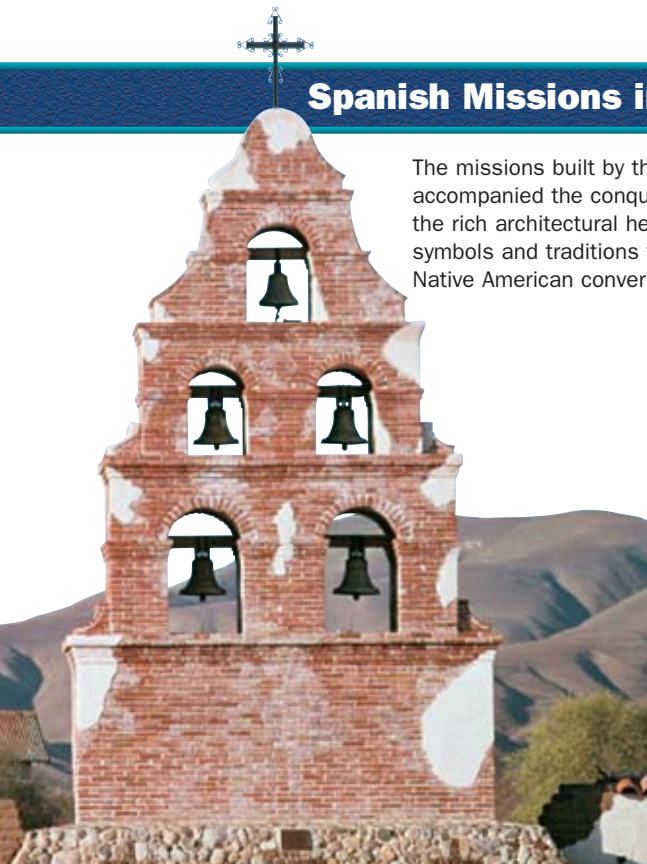
- 1. Movement** How many voyages to the Americas did Columbus make?
- 2. Place** In what years did England and France sail to the Americas and which regions did they explore?



## Spanish Missions in the Southwest

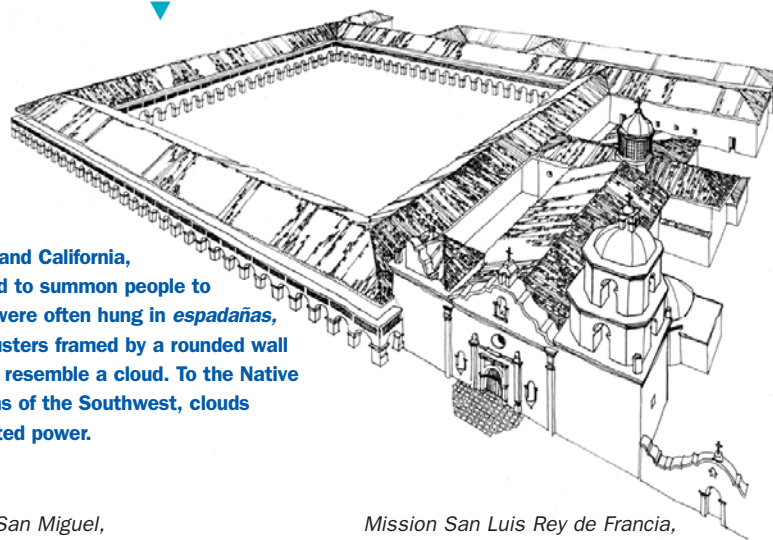
The missions built by the friars who accompanied the conquistadors combined the rich architectural heritage of Spain with symbols and traditions familiar to their Native American converts.

Most missions were a series of buildings grouped around a courtyard, which was used for festivals or services. These courtyards acknowledged the Native American practice of worshipping in the open air.



◀ In Texas and California, bells used to summon people to worship were often hung in *espadañas*, tiered clusters framed by a rounded wall meant to resemble a cloud. To the Native Americans of the Southwest, clouds represented power.

Mission San Miguel,  
California



Mission San Luis Rey de Francia,  
California

Menéndez de Avilés not only drove out the French but in 1565 established a lonely outpost, which he called St. Augustine. It has survived to become the oldest European-founded city in the present-day United States.

**SETTLING THE SOUTHWEST** In 1540, in search of another wealthy empire to conquer, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado led the first Spanish expedition into what is now Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. After wandering for two years, the only precious metal he carried home was his own battered gold-plated armor.

The Spaniards who followed in Coronado's wake came to the Southwest largely to search for veins of silver ore or to spread the Roman Catholic religion. As the native population dwindled from disease, Spanish priests gathered the surviving natives into large communities, called *congregaciones*. In the winter of 1609–1610, Pedro de Peralta, governor of Spain's northern holdings, called **New Mexico**, led missionary priests and other settlers to a tributary of the upper Rio Grande. Together they built a capital called Santa Fe, or "Holy Faith." In the next two decades, several Christian missions were built among the Pueblos in the area. The hooves of pack mules wore down a 1,500-mile trail known as *el Camino Real*, or "the Royal Road," as they carried goods back and forth between Santa Fe and Mexico City. **D**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**D** Why did the Spanish build a road between Santa Fe and Mexico City?

## Resistance to the Spanish

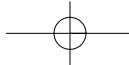
The Catholic missionaries who settled north of Mexico not only tried to Christianize the peoples they encountered but also attempted to impose Spanish culture on them. The native inhabitants of New Mexico resisted and eventually rebelled against the Spaniards' attempts to transform their lives and beliefs.

**CONFLICT IN NEW MEXICO** While Spanish priests converted scores of Native Americans in New Mexico, tension marked the relationship between the priests and their new converts. As they sought to transform the Native Americans' cultures, Spanish priests and soldiers smashed and burned objects held sacred by

#### Vocabulary

##### conversion:

A change in which a person adopts a new belief, opinion, or religion



local communities and suppressed many of their ceremonial dances and rituals.

During the 1670s, priests and soldiers around Santa Fe began forcing Native Americans to help support the missions by paying a tribute, an offering of either goods or services. The tribute was usually a bushel of maize or a deer hide, but the Spanish also forced Native Americans to work for them and sometimes abused them physically. Native Americans who practiced their native religion or refused to pay tribute were beaten.

**POPÉ'S REBELLION** One unfortunate Native American who felt the sting of a Spanish whip was the Pueblo religious leader **Popé**. The priests punished Popé for his worship practices, which they interpreted as witchcraft. The whipping left the Pueblo leader scarred with hatred and ready for rebellion. In 1680, he led a well-organized uprising against the Spanish that involved some 17,000 people from villages all over New Mexico. The triumphant fighters destroyed Spanish churches, executed priests, and drove the Spaniards back into New Spain. "The heathen," one Spanish officer wrote about the uprising, "have concealed a mortal hatred for our holy faith and enmity for the Spanish nation." For the next 14 years—until Spanish armies regained control of the area—the southwest region of the future United States once again belonged to its original inhabitants. **E**

But Spain would never again have complete control of the Americas. In 1588, England had defeated the Spanish Armada, ending Spain's naval dominance in the Atlantic. In time, England began forging colonies along the eastern shore of North America, thus extending its own empire in the New World.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Causes**

**E** Why did the Native Americans of New Mexico revolt against the Spanish settlers?

## WORLD STAGE

THE DEFEAT OF THE SPANISH ARMADA

To stop English raids on his treasure ships, King Philip II of Spain assembled an armada, or fleet, of about 130 ships, carrying nearly 19,000 soldiers. In the summer of 1588, the Spanish Armada sailed into the English Channel. However, English warships out-maneuvered the vessels, bombarding them with heavy, long-range cannons. Aiding the English cannons were powerful storms that destroyed much of the Armada. Its defeat dealt a blow to Spain's military power and opened the way for the rest of Europe to venture into the Americas.

1

ASSESSMENT

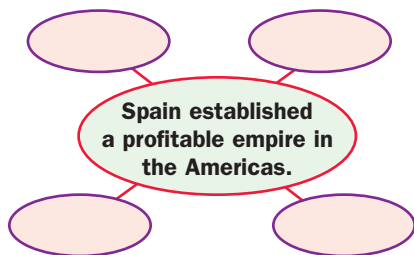
**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- |                  |            |                     |             |
|------------------|------------|---------------------|-------------|
| •Hernándo Cortés | •New Spain | • <i>encomienda</i> | •New Mexico |
| •conquistador    | •mestizo   | •Juan Ponce de León | •Popé       |

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Re-create the web below on your paper and fill in events related to the main idea in the center.



**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. EVALUATING IMPACT**

Do you agree or disagree with this statement: The Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, which led to the creation of Mexico, was neither a triumph nor a defeat? Support your opinion with references to the text.

**Think About:**

- the actions of the conquistadors
- the effects of disease on the native peoples
- the *encomienda* system
- the mestizo population in Mexico today

**4. FORMING GENERALIZATIONS**

State three main ideas about the Spaniards' exploration and settlement north of Mexico and their interaction with Native Americans there.

**5. MAKING INFERENCES**

What can you infer from the fact that approximately 17,000 Native Americans from all over New Mexico took part in Popé's rebellion?