

Narrator:

Once Columbus had discovered America a race for exploration began among the European nations. Each wanting to be the first to discover new areas. The motivations were said to be for God (Spreading Christianity) Glory (Prestige for their country) and Gold.

By the 1490s the voyages of the Portuguese and Spanish had begun exploring the world and opening new territories. Spain and Portugal feared that the other might claim some of its newly discovered territories they were in strong competition. They resolved their concerns by agreeing on a line of separation, an imaginary line that divided the world for which each country would be allowed to explore. According to the Treaty of Tordesillas signed in 1494, the line would extend from north to south through the Atlantic Ocean and the easternmost part of the South American continent. Unexplored territories east of the line would be controlled by Portugal, and those west of the line by Spain. This treaty gave Portugal control over its route around Africa, and it gave Spain rights to almost all of the Americas.

Soon the discovery of Columbus got around and other explorers wanted to be the first for the new frontier. Government-sponsored explorers from many countries joined the race to the Americas. A Venetian seaman, John Cabot, explored the New England coastline of the Americas for England. The Portuguese sea captain Pedro Cabral landed in South America in 1500. Amerigo Vespucci a Florentine, went along on several voyages and wrote letters describing the lands he saw. These letters led to the use of the name America (after Amerigo) for the new lands.

Europeans called these territories the New World, but the lands were hardly new. They already had flourishing civilizations made up of millions of people when the Europeans arrived. The Americas were, of course, new to the Europeans, who quickly saw opportunities for conquest and exploitation. The Spanish conquerors of the Americas — known as conquistadors—were individuals whose guns and determination brought them incredible success. The forces of Hernán Cortés took only three years to overthrow the mighty Aztec Empire in Central Mexico. By 1550, the Spanish had gained control of northern Mexico. In South America, an expedition led by Francisco Pizarro took control of the Incan Empire high in the Peruvian Andes. Within 30 years, the western part of Latin America, as these lands in Mexico and Central and South America were called, had been brought under Spanish control. (The Portuguese took over Brazil, which fell on their side of the line of demarcation.)

By 1535, the Spanish had created a system of colonial rule in the Americas. Queen Isabella declared Native Americans to be subjects to the Spanish crown. She granted the Spanish *encomienda*, or the right to use Native Americans as laborers. The Spanish rulers in South America were supposed to protect Native Americans, but the settlers were far from Spain and largely ignored this rule. Native Americans were put to work on sugar plantations and in gold and silver mines. Forced labor, starvation, and especially disease took a toll on Native American lives. With little or no natural resistance to European diseases, the native peoples were one by

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one killed by smallpox, measles, and typhus, and many of them died. Hispaniola, for example, had a population of 250,000 when Columbus arrived. By 1538, only 500 Native Americans had survived. In Mexico, the population dropped from 25 million in 1519 to 1 million in 1630. In the early years of the conquest, Catholic missionaries converted and baptized hundreds of thousands of native peoples. With the arrival of the missionaries came parishes, schools, and hospitals

A new economy was emerging. International trade was beginning as more goods were being brought from the new world. Spanish conquests in the Americas effected not only the conquered but also the conquerors. This was especially true as economics were concerned. Wherever they went, Europeans sought gold and silver and would do whatever it took to find the riches.

Colonists established plantations and ranches in order to make money. Agricultural products native to the Americas, such as potatoes, cocoa, corn, and tobacco, were also shipped to Europe. The extensive exchange of plants and animals between the Old and New Worlds—known as the Columbian Exchange—transformed economic activity in both worlds. At the same time, Portuguese expansion in the East created its own economic impact
