

## Unit 03: Exploration and Early Colonization of Texas – 1519-1821

### Spain Begins to Explore

For many centuries, Christians had lived in Spain. Then, in A.D. 711, people from Africa called Moors conquered much of the area. The Moors made Spain part of the Islamic world. Many cities became centers of trade and learning.

Christians wanted to regain their lands, though. They began a series of wars called the **Reconquista**, or reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula. They saw the struggle as a religious duty. They believed that God wanted them to defeat the Moors.

The Christians often fought among themselves, though. As a result, the reconquest took hundreds of years. In 1492, they finished this work. They drove the last Moors out of Spain. When the Reconquista ended, soldiers welcomed new lands to conquer.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed from Spain. His aim was to reach India and China by sailing west. Instead, his ship landed on an island in the Caribbean Sea. He had reached a land that Europeans had not known about before—the Americas. He returned to Spain with gold. He also brought back some **indigenous**, or native, people.

The voyage of Columbus excited the Spanish. The king and queen sent more explorers to the Americas. They were called **conquistadors**, or conquerors. They came to the New World hoping to gain wealth and glory. They also wanted to spread Christianity.

A Spanish legend added to their desire to conquer. The story said that when the Moors came to Spain, seven leaders had fled. They then built seven cities of great wealth. The conquistadors hoped to find the cities in the Americas. Spain was not just looking in Central and South America for treasure. It also looked north. As the Spanish turned their attention to the area north of Central Mexico, they encountered for the first time the Indians of what is now Texas. This encounter brought good and ill to both sides.



Captain **Alonso Álvarez de Pineda** led one of these early Spanish expeditions in the northern part of what became New Spain. In 1519, shortly after Cortés arrived in Mexico, Álvarez de Pineda searched for a water route to the Pacific Ocean. He sailed along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico from present-day Florida down to Mexico. There, he met Cortés, who imprisoned some of Pineda's men because Cortés thought of Álvarez de Pineda as a rival. Álvarez de Pineda's voyage might have led to the first contact between Europeans and American Indians in what is now Texas.

One of the explorers was Hernando Cortés. In 1519 he landed on the coast of Mexico. One native people, known as the Aztecs, had a large and wealthy empire in Mexico. Cortés wanted the Aztec riches for himself and for Spain. After they defeated the Aztecs in battle, the Spanish took control of their empire.

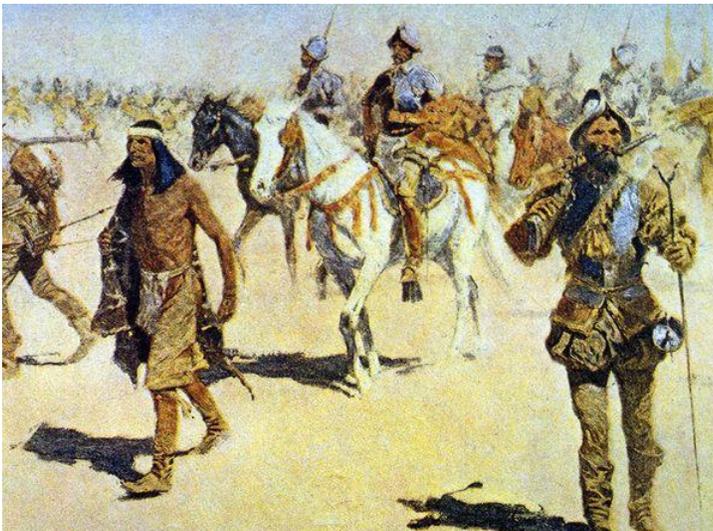
Other conquistadors took control of other parts of the Americas. The Spanish made the area where the Aztecs once ruled a **viceroyalty**. This is a land ruled by a viceroy. A viceroy is an official chosen by a monarch.

## Cultures Meet in Texas

Spain sent explorers into Texas to look for more treasure. As a result, native Texans met Europeans for the first time.

In 1519, Alonso Álvarez de Pineda sailed a ship along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to Mexico. He was looking for a water route to the Pacific Ocean. He did not find it. Still, his trip produced a good map of the Texas coast.

In 1528, Pánfilo de Narváez and his soldiers planned to conquer the lands north of Mexico, but his group got separated from their ships and many became sick. They left Florida in rafts, crossed the Gulf of Mexico, and landed in Texas. Although most died, one explorer, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca survived.



**Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca** was one of the Spaniards on the first raft and became the first European to extensively explore the land that became Texas. Cabeza de Vaca lived among the Atakapan Indians, traveling the Texas coast as a trader. He escaped from slavery in 1534 and wandered throughout Texas, becoming known by Indians as a **shaman**, or medicine man.

Later, he wrote in a journal about his travels. He reported facts about the American Indians and wildlife he had seen. Among the things he told about was the **bison**, or buffalo, which was unknown to Europeans. Because of his book, other Spaniards believed that the legendary Seven Cities of Cibola were located in what is now the southwestern part of the United States.

The hope of finding golden cities led the Spanish to explore Texas. In 1538, Marcos de Niza led the first expedition. After Indians killed his guide, Marcos de Niza returned to Mexico. What is more, he claimed to have seen the golden city himself.

In 1540, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado set out at the head of 1,000 men. He reached present-day New Mexico and attacked one of the pueblos. He conquered it easily but found no riches. An American Indian told him of a golden city in the east. The journey took him across the Texas Panhandle, but he only found an Indian village. Coronado gave up and returned to Mexico. He told officials that the land north of Mexico was worthless.

Another Spanish explorer came to Texas from the east. Hernando De Soto left Florida in 1539. When he died, Luis de Moscoso Alvarado took charge. The party entered East Texas. Later all the men returned to Mexico.

Spanish explorers had seen much of Texas and learned about the land and the American Indians there. However, they had not found gold or silver. Disappointed, Spanish explorers mostly lost interest in Texas.

## French Explorers

Other European countries also wanted some of the wealth that Spain had found in the Americas. The French hoped to find a water route to Asia through North America. They looked for a shortcut called the **Northwest Passage**. They started colonies and settled along the lakes and rivers of Canada. They did not find any gold, but they did set up a trade in furs that brought some riches.

Some French explorers went down the Mississippi River. They hoped it was that shortcut. One of them was La Salle.

La Salle wanted to build an empire along the Mississippi. He planned to base it on trade. In 1682, he went down the Mississippi to its mouth. He claimed the river and all the land he passed for the



king of France. He called it Louisiana. Then he returned to France to find more men for his next step.

In 1684, La Salle left France. He hoped to reach the mouth of the Mississippi and build a fort. He missed his target, though, and landed in Texas instead. His force had been weakened because he had lost two ships.

La Salle landed at Matagorda Bay. He built Fort St. Louis. He led trips along the coast to try to find the Mississippi River. On one trip, his men carried out a **mutiny**. A mutiny is a revolt by soldiers against their leader. They killed La Salle. Later, Indians attacked the fort. They took five captives and killed the rest.

The French colony had failed. Even so, Spanish officials were alarmed. They feared that the French would grab Texas. They wanted to keep the area as part of their empire.

When the Spanish set out to find Fort St. Louis, they did not know it had been attacked by Indians and deserted by the French. After increasing numbers of French traders began arriving in the area, Spain's interest in the frontier returned once again. American Indian groups in Texas suffered as a result. Increased trade with Europeans led to the exchange of guns, which many groups used against their enemies. European diseases also wiped out large portions of the population.

