



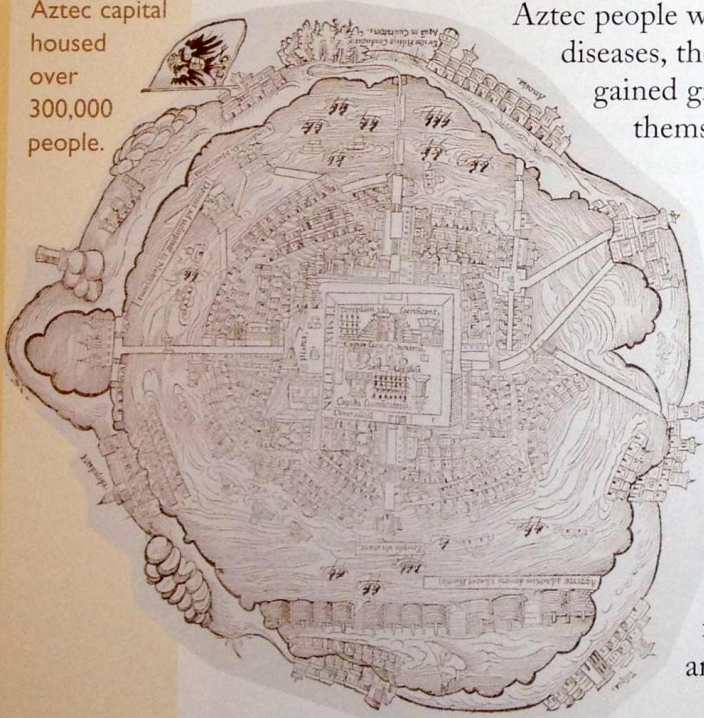
The Spanish Empire

The Aztecs presented this map of Tenochtitlán to Hernán Cortés between 1519 and 1521. With its huge buildings, the Aztec capital housed over 300,000 people.

Gold and Glory

Like many European countries during the 1400s and 1500s, Spain set out to seek wealth in other lands, sending explorers to North, South, and Central America. In 1519, Hernán Cortés and his men entered the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán in central Mexico and called it the most beautiful city in the world. Within a decade, the city lay in ruins. The Spaniards tore down public buildings, filled in canals, burned the gardens, and destroyed the Aztecs' religious statues, putting up Christian statues instead. Conquering the Aztec people weakened from European diseases, the Spanish soldiers gained great wealth for themselves and Spain.

In the 1530s, Francisco Pizarro conquered the Incan Empire of South America. He captured the ruler Atahualpa, hoping to exchange him for gold. Once the Incas gave him the gold, Pizarro had Atahualpa killed and seized the Incas' land, mines, storehouses, and temples.



Moving beyond Mexico and South America

The Spanish pushed north from Mexico and Peru and started new **colonies** in what are now Florida and New Mexico. However, Mexico, South America, and the Caribbean remained central to the rich Spanish Empire.

What made the Spanish Empire wealthy was the work of the Native Americans. The Spanish turned the Natives into slaves, forcing them into mines to hack out gold and silver and making them labor on farms and ranches with little food and no pay. They often punished them with whippings, beatings, and death. Sickness, too, took a heavy toll.

The Spanish settled Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1609. The building shown here is believed to be the oldest Spanish building in the United States.

A Room of Gold

"They led us to our quarters, which were in some large house. . . . Here Montezuma [the Aztec emperor] now kept the great shrines of his gods, and a secret chamber containing gold bars and jewels. This was the treasure which he had inherited from his father, which he had never touched."

Bernal Díaz, a soldier in Cortés's expedition, in his account The True History of the Conquest of New Spain, written in the 1500s but not published until 1632



The friars who founded the California missions were Franciscans. They were named for St. Francis of Assisi, who founded their religious order.

Competing for Power

Other European countries, seeing Spain's success in the Americas, also wanted to gain colonies and riches of their own. As other countries' power in North America grew, Spain wanted to make sure it kept its empire, including the western end of the continent.

Spain hoped to do so by starting settlements north of Mexico. However, few people were willing to move from established Mexican colonies to the land that would become New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. So Spain decided to send small groups of soldiers and a few friars to these areas to found missions. The friars hoped to **convert** the Native Americans to both Christianity and the Spanish way of life. By the mid-1700s, the friars and soldiers had forced the Natives to build a few missions in this area.

Spain Claims California

Although Spain had claimed the area that is now California in the 1540s, it had done little to settle the land. In the 1750s, however, Russian fur traders began moving into the waters off the coast of northern California. Spain wanted to make sure Russia would not grab the land for itself.

Spain's king ordered Mexico to defend the Spanish Empire, including California, from all other groups, especially Russia. A colonial official in Mexico, José de Gálvez, had wanted to organize all the lands north of Mexico into one large area. The king's orders now gave him that chance.

José de Gálvez's Plan

Gálvez decided to use missions to colonize the lands north of Mexico, including California. The Catholic Church would pay for the friars and the supplies for the missions, saving the Spanish government money. As they had in New Mexico,

Father Junípero Serra (1713-1784)



As a young man, Junípero Serra rose quickly in the Catholic Church, becoming a teacher in Spain by age twenty-four. However, his real goal was to set up missions in the Americas. In 1749, Serra was sent to Mexico, but it was not until 1768 that he could finally fulfill his goal of beginning missions.

Today, people view Serra in different ways. To many, he is a hero for devoting his energy, mind, and faith to the missions. To others, though, he is someone who was willing to destroy the cultures and religions of Native Americans to impose his own culture and faith on them.

Texas, and Arizona, the friars would convert Native Americans in California to both Christianity and the Spanish culture. Once that was done, it was thought, Mexicans might be more likely to move into the area.

Gálvez had heard that the areas of California where Monterey and San Diego now stand had good harbors and would be excellent spots to place the missions. Ships could easily land, bringing supplies to the friars and soldiers. Two volunteers would lead the trip: the military leader Don Gaspar de Portolá and the religious leader, a friar named Junípero Serra.

Brief Report on the Destruction of the Indians

"To these quiet Lambs [the Native Americans] . . . came the Spaniards like most cruel tigers, wolves, and lions, enraged with a sharp and tedious hunger; for these forty years past, minding nothing else but the slaughter of these unfortunate wretches, whom with diverse kinds of torments neither seen nor heard of before, they have so cruelly and inhumanely butchered."

Spanish priest Bartolomé de las Casas in a 1542 report about the treatment of Indians by the Spanish