

Routes of Exploration to the New World

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, you read about why Europeans crossed the Atlantic Ocean and sailed to the Americas. In this chapter, you will read about eight European explorers. You will discover why these explorers came to the New World and how their arrival affected the native peoples.




In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on a Caribbean island and claimed it for Spain. Columbus's voyage prompted others to explore the Western Hemisphere. **Conquistadors** (cone-KEES-tah-dors), or Spanish explorers, planted the Spanish flag throughout the Caribbean and throughout Central and South America.

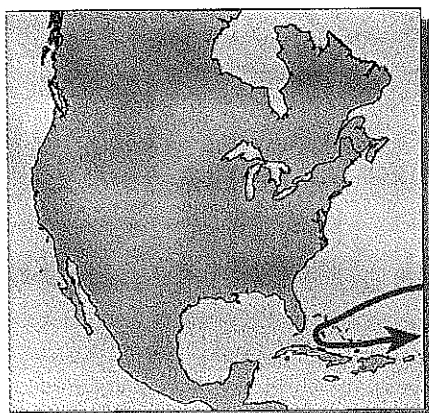
Explorers from England, France, and Holland also came. They wanted to find a **Northwest Passage**, a shortcut from Europe to Asia through North America. The explorers never found such a passage. But they quickly claimed North American land for their European sponsors—the countries that paid for their voyages.

Some people call the explorers great men. Certainly their accomplishments were great. Their voyages established new trade routes and produced better world maps. However, as you will learn, they also killed many native people who opposed them. They also infected them with **contagious diseases**, sicknesses that spread quickly.

Look at the matrix on this page. A matrix is a chart with rows and columns, useful for organizing and comparing information. As you read this chapter, think about how you can use this matrix to compare the explorers with one another.

Comparing New-World Explorers

	Columbus	Cabot	Ponce de León		
Personal Background		?	?		
Sponsor		?	?		
Motives		?	?		
Dates	?	?	?		
Route of Exploration	?	?	?		
Impact	?	?	?		



The route of Christopher Columbus's first voyage to the New World

5.2 Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus was born in 1451 in Genoa, a busy seaport on the coast of Italy. As a child, Columbus had read about the travels of Marco Polo. In the late 1200s, Polo had journeyed to Asia and brought back gold, jewels, and spices from China. Columbus was also interested in exploring these faraway lands.

So, around the age of 15, Columbus became a sailor. He sailed on ships that went south along the coast of Africa and north to Ireland. They may have gone to Iceland. Viking sailors from Norway had already explored as far as Greenland and the eastern Canadian shores. But Columbus and others did not know about these voyages.

The Portuguese were trying to get to Asia by sailing south around the southern tip of Africa. In the 1400s, people knew much less about the world than is known today. Columbus thought the Earth was much smaller than it is. He also believed it had just one ocean. He thought that he could reach Asia fast by sailing west across the Atlantic.

Columbus tried to find someone to pay for his voyage. The kings of Portugal, France, and England turned him down. Their advisors thought that the route around Africa was shorter. Finally, after almost 13 years, Columbus convinced Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain. They gave him three small ships and about 90 men. Columbus promised to return with gold and spices to make Spain rich.

On August 3, 1492, Columbus left Spain with three ships, the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*. They sailed southwest past the Canary Islands and then west across the Atlantic Ocean. Early on the morning of October 12, a sailor spotted an island with white beaches and dense green forests.

Columbus named the island San Salvador, which means "Holy Savior" in Spanish. He claimed it for Spain. Friendly people greeted him. Columbus called them *Indians*, because he thought that he had reached the **East Indies**. Columbus captured some Indians as prisoners. He made them take him to the island of Cuba, where he found people wearing gold ornaments and pearls.

For three months, Columbus searched for gold and spices. In 1493, he sailed back to Spain, carrying a few gold ornaments and Indian captives. Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand rewarded Columbus and agreed to pay for more voyages.

East Indies: Southeast Asia, including India, Indonesia, and Malaysia

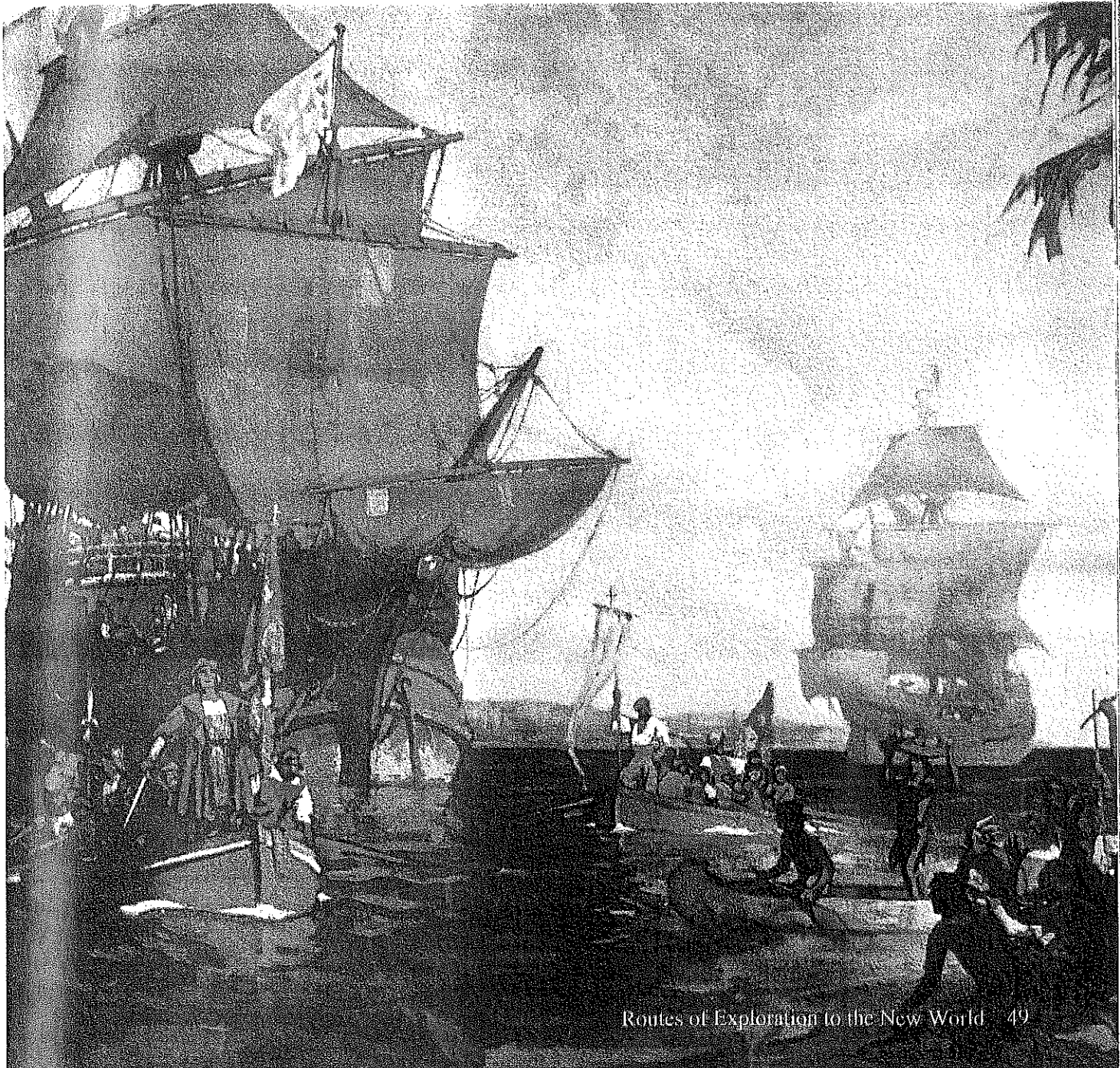
Columbus promised to bring them “as much gold as they need...and as many slaves as they ask.”

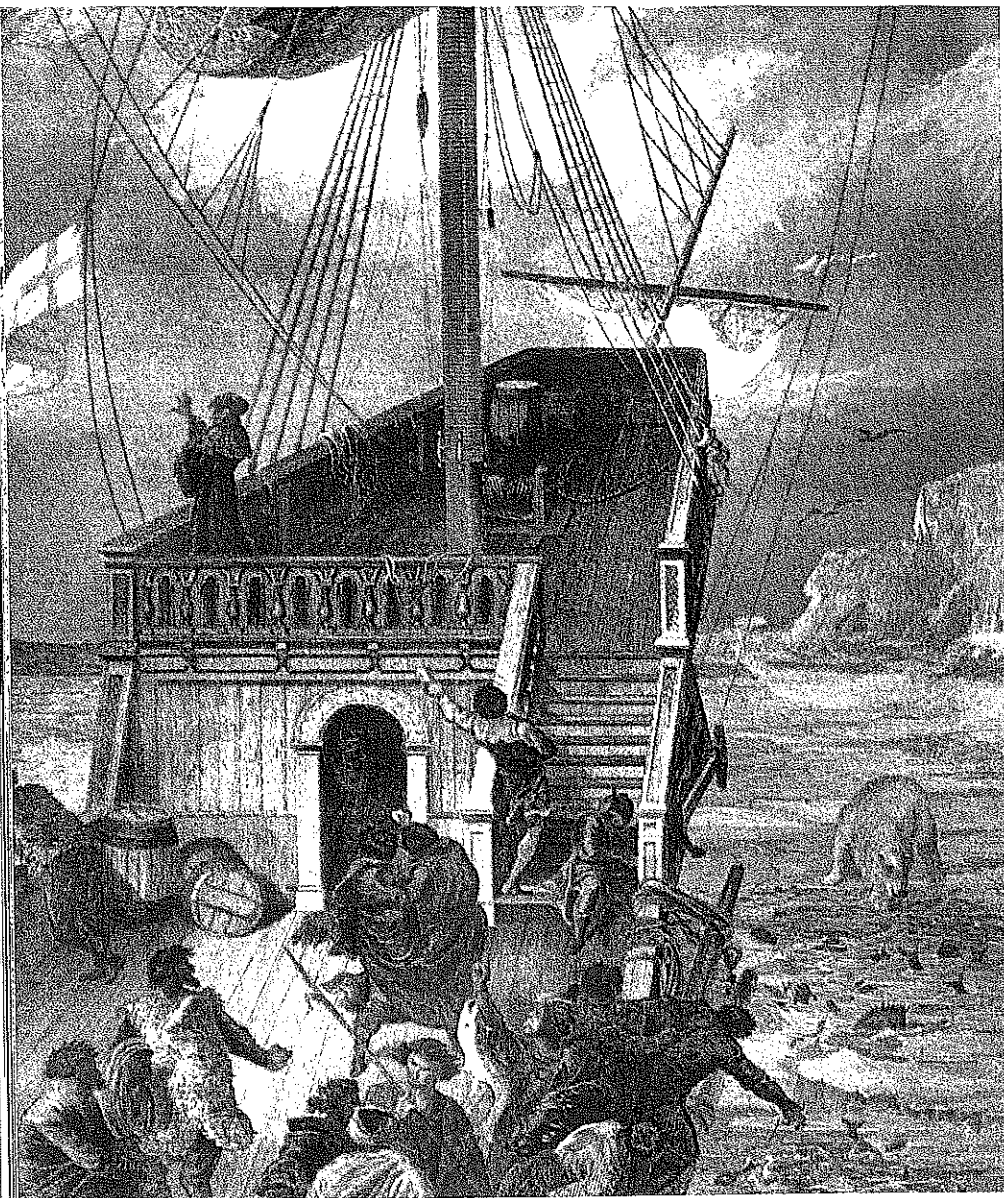
Columbus made three more voyages, exploring more islands around Cuba and the coasts of South and Central America. He found very little gold. In fact, when he died in 1506, he didn't know that he had reached the New World.

Other Spanish and Portuguese explorers did find gold. They also found the perfect climate for growing crops, such as sugar cane and tobacco. These discoveries helped them establish wealthy **colonies** in the New World. But to do this, they forced the Indians to work in fields and mines. They hanged or burned those who resisted.

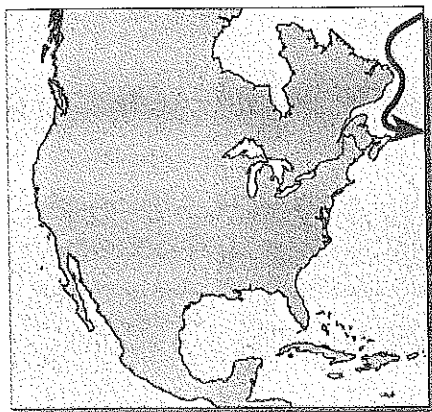
colonies: places ruled by another country, not by their own people

Early on the morning of October 12, 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on the island of San Salvador in the Caribbean Sea.





John Cabot, standing near the bow of the ship, leaves the coast of Labrador, Canada, to return to England.



John Cabot's first voyage to the New World in 1497

5.3 John Cabot

The trading that interested Columbus caught the attention of other explorers as well. Giovanni Caboto, later called John Cabot, was a young merchant (shopkeeper) in Venice, Italy. He was a skilled navigator who wanted to explore the world. Also, he had seen the spices and silks that were being traded from Asia. He wanted to find the place these goods came from. So, he set out to find the East Indies. Like Columbus, he thought the fastest route to Asia was to sail west.

In 1496, some merchants in England agreed to pay for his voyage. King Henry VII gave Cabot permission to explore any "unknown land." Cabot left Bristol, England, in May 1497, with one small ship and 17 men. They sailed around the coast of Ireland and then north and west across the Atlantic. They sailed north

of Columbus's route to avoid territory claimed by Spain.

On June 24, Cabot reached the eastern coast of Canada and claimed the land for England. He saw thick green forests and plentiful fish, but no golden Chinese cities. Cabot returned to England to tell the king that he had found Asia and would soon find its wealth.

The next year, Cabot sailed back to North America. This time he explored at least as far south as Chesapeake Bay, near modern-day Maryland. But his ship sank, and he never returned to England.

Like Columbus, Cabot never realized that he had discovered a new continent. He did not know that his voyage opened the way for English settlers to come to North America.

5.4 Juan Ponce de León

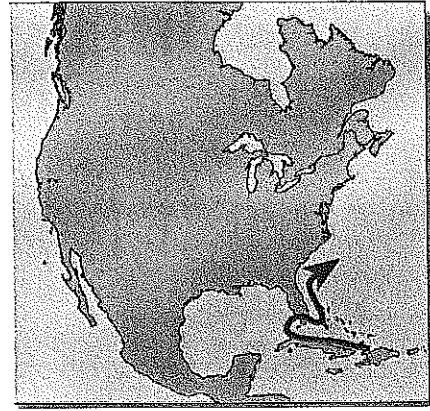
When Columbus left for his second voyage to the New World, a young soldier named Juan Ponce de León came along. Once in the New World, he settled on a Caribbean island named Hispaniola. (Today, this island is divided into the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic.) On Hispaniola, he became a military commander under the governor.

In 1506, Ponce de León discovered an island named Borinquin (later renamed Puerto Rico). There, he met an Indian carrying a large nugget of gold. Hoping to discover more gold, Ponce de León led soldiers to conquer Puerto Rico. Although Ponce de León killed many Native Americans, King Ferdinand of Spain made him governor of the island.

Ponce de León soon heard stories of another island, one with a magic fountain. This was the “fountain of youth” whose waters were said to make old people young again. Ponce de León asked permission to search for this island. He wanted the glory of finding such a wonderful spot.

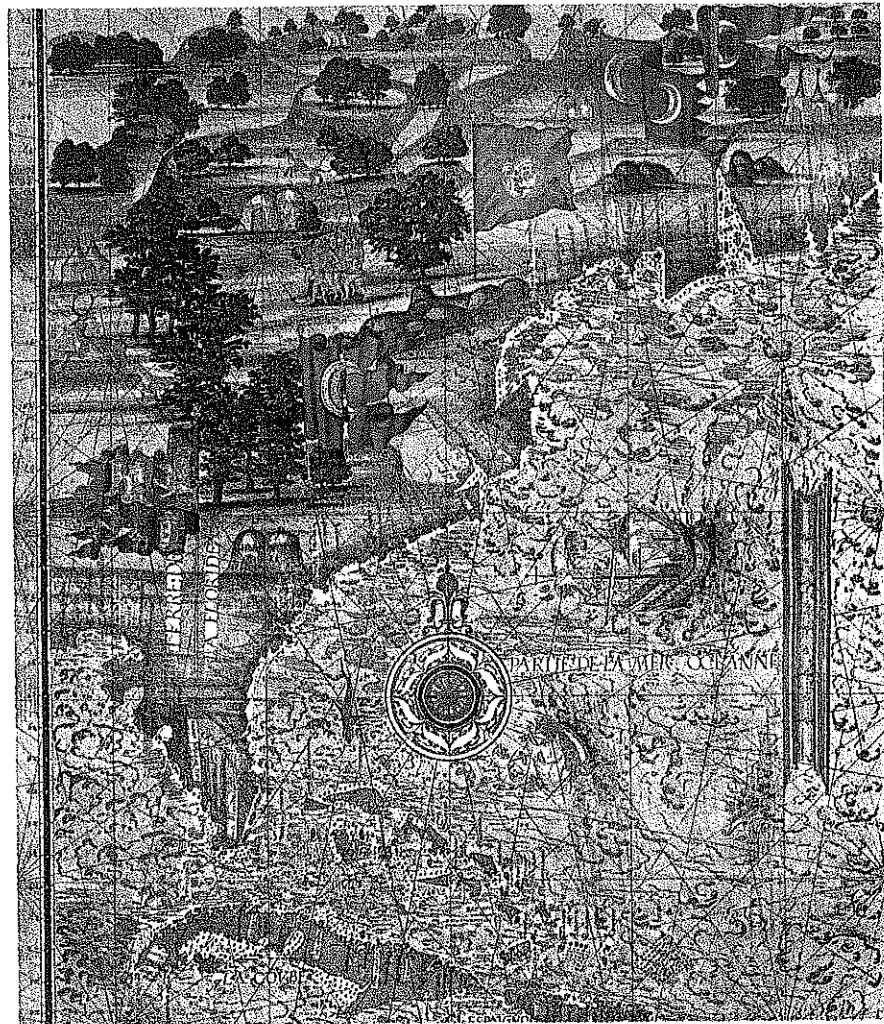
Ponce de León sailed from Puerto Rico in 1513. After a month, he reached a coast with palm trees, sweet-smelling flowers, and beautiful birds. That day was the feast day of the Easter of Flowers, called *Pascua Florida* in Spanish. Ponce de León named the land Florida and claimed it for Spain. He sailed up and down the coast, but he didn't find the fountain of youth. So he went back to Puerto Rico.

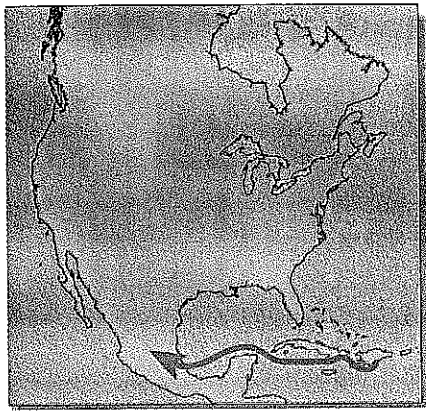
In 1521, he returned to Florida to start a settlement. He brought 200 men with horses, cattle, and seeds. The Indians resented the invasion. They attacked, and an arrow struck Ponce de León. Wounded, de León sailed to Cuba and died soon after. He never knew that Florida was not an island but part of a vast continent.



The route of Juan Ponce de León

Can you find Florida on this 1555 map of North America?





The route of Hernán Cortés from Cuba to Mexico City

5.5 Hernán Cortés

Spaniards looking for gold heard stories of a rich Mexican empire. In 1519, Hernán Cortés, a Spanish nobleman living in Cuba, sailed to Mexico to conquer a native people called the *Aztecs*. He wanted adventure, gold, and silver.

Cortés first met the Aztecs on the exact day that the Aztecs believed a god would attack them. Thinking Cortés was this god, they sent gold to convince him to leave. The gold just made Cortés more determined to conquer them.

Cortés marched to the Aztec capital, a beautiful city on an island in a lake where Mexico City is today. When the emperor invited him in, Cortés took the emperor prisoner.

For six months, Cortés quietly held the Aztec emperor prisoner in his own city. Then, after a short trip away from the Aztec capital, Cortés returned. As he entered the city, the Aztecs attacked. Cortés and his army were surrounded by fierce Aztec warriors. The Spaniards fled the city. Before leaving, they stuffed their pockets with gold. Many of them were so heavily weighed down with gold that they drowned in the dark waters of the lake.

After their defeat, the Spaniards surrounded the Aztec capital for nearly a year. Many of the Aztecs had been weakened or killed by smallpox

(a European disease) and began to starve to death. When Cortés and his army attacked, the Aztec warriors put up a strong defense; nevertheless, they were finally defeated in 1521.

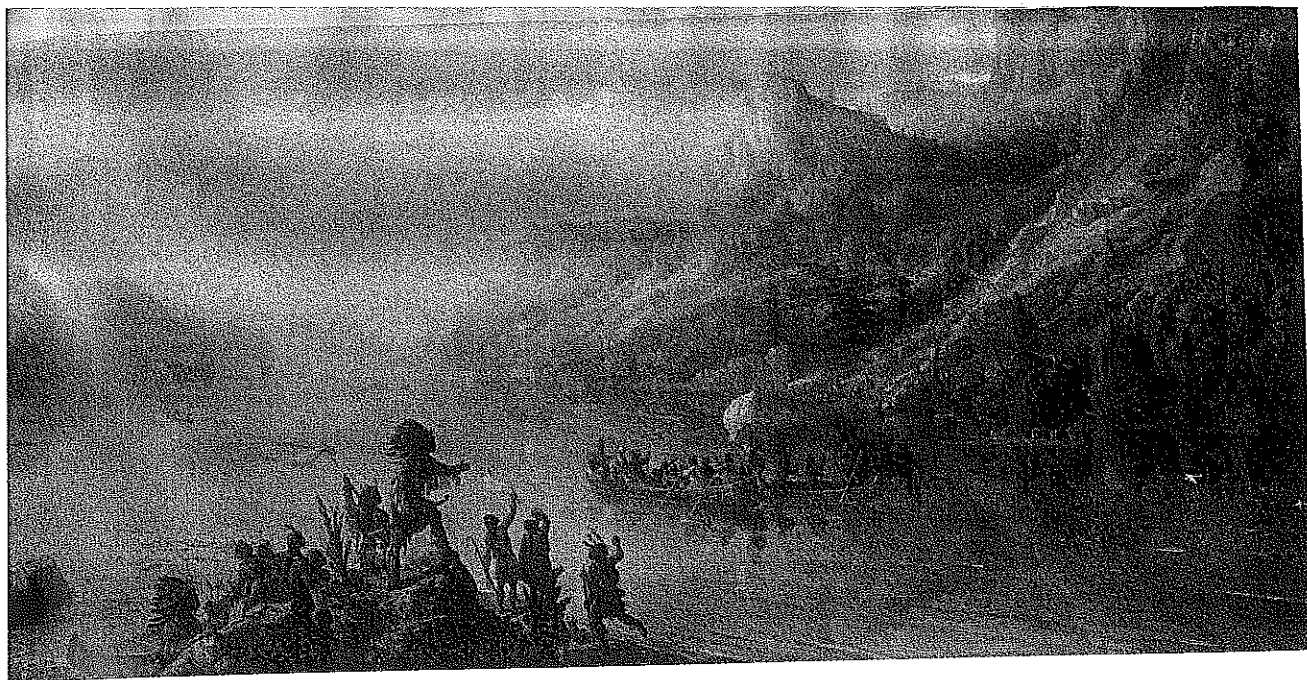
The Spaniards now ruled all of Mexico. The mighty Aztec Empire lay in ruins. An Aztec poet wrote a sad poem about the mistreatment of his people:

We are crushed to the ground; we lie in ruins.

There is nothing but grief and suffering in Mexico, where once we saw beauty and valor.

Hernán Cortés sits in a chair (on the right) with his translator at his side. He is talking with a group of Native Americans he hopes will join him in conquering the Aztecs.





5.6 Jacques Cartier

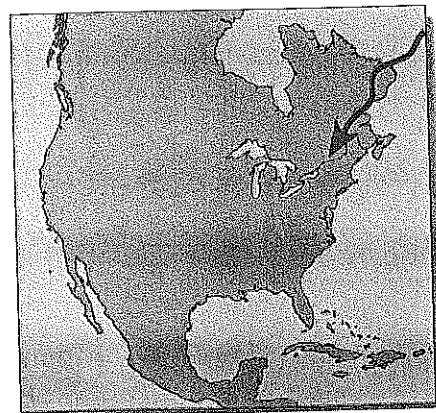
In 1521, Spain reached Asia by sailing around the southern tip of South America. Explorers had learned that the Americas lay between Europe and Asia. But people still thought that China was not far beyond the west coast of North America. King Francis I of France hoped to reach China's riches by sailing across North America. But no one had looked for such a water passage.

In 1534, the French king sent an experienced sailor and navigator, Jacques Cartier, to find this Northwest Passage. Cartier sailed west to Newfoundland, in present-day Canada. He entered a large gulf through a strait (a narrow waterway between two large land areas). He claimed the surrounding land for France. Then, he saw a waterway leading west. But his ship was low on food, so he had to return to France.

The next year, King Francis sent Cartier back to explore and map the waterway. Cartier reached its mouth on the feast day of Saint Lawrence. He named the river the *Saint (St.) Lawrence*. With Indian guides, he sailed almost 1,000 miles up river, until his boat could go no farther. He visited an Indian village, and brought its chief back to France. The chief told the king of great riches farther west.

In 1541, the king sent Cartier on a third voyage to set up a French empire in North America. He took more than 100 settlers. After enduring two harsh winters, Cartier and the settlers gave up. In 1542, they returned to France. Still, Cartier had staked France's claim in North America. Sixty years later, "New France" had its first settlers.

Jacques Cartier sails up the St. Lawrence River in 1534.



The route Jacques Cartier followed up the Saint Lawrence River



Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and his men searched for one of the Seven Cities of Gold in Cibola.

5.7 Francisco Vásquez de Coronado

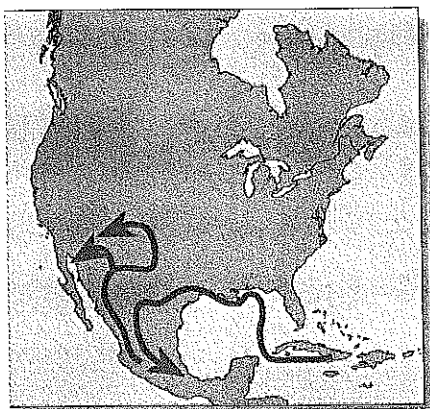
Spain's rulers gained wealth and power from their land claims in Mexico and South America. So, they wanted more land in North America. In 1540, hundreds of Spanish conquistadors marched north from Mexico under the command of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado.

Coronado had come to America to seek glory and fortune. Although he was a nobleman by birth, his brother had inherited most of the family wealth. Coronado paid for his expedition with money from his rich wife and the viceroy, or governor, of Mexico.

A priest had told Coronado that he had seen one of the Seven Cities of Gold in Cibola (modern-day New Mexico). The Spanish had heard that the Seven Cities were as rich as the Aztec empire in gold. Coronado marched to Cibola. He found Indian pueblos but no gold. Scouts looked further. They found the Grand Canyon and the Rio Grande valley, but no gold.

Still dreaming of gold, Coronado listened to an Indian slave. The slave told of a land where boats with golden eagles sailed past trees hung with golden bells. To find this land, Coronado marched across the plains to what is now Kansas. Again he found no gold. Angry, Coronado had the Indian strangled before heading home.

Coronado and his men returned in disgrace to New Spain in 1542. Representatives of the Spanish king later charged him with bad leadership of the expedition and treating the Indians cruelly. Only the Spanish missionaries considered Coronado's expedition successful. It gave them a chance to convert Indian in the southwestern part of North America to Christianity.



The route of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado through the American Southwest between 1540 and 1542

5.8 Henry Hudson

Holland and England kept searching for a northern sea route to Asia. In 1609, the Dutch East India Company in Holland hired Henry Hudson, an English sea captain. He set out to reach China by sailing across the top of Europe, near the Arctic Circle. His crew grew tired of ice and cold. They rebelled against their captain. Hudson agreed to change course and sail west across the Atlantic instead.

In July, Hudson and his men reached Maine and sailed south to Chesapeake Bay. Returning north, the ship entered a narrow harbor. Hudson saw a large body of water leading north. Believing this was the North-

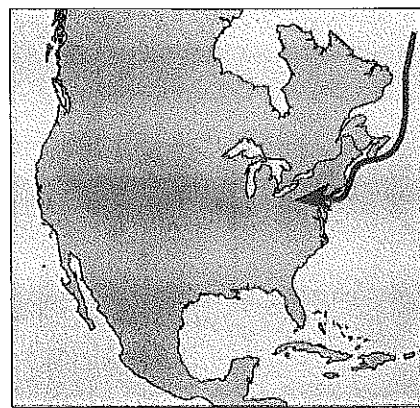
west Passage, Hudson sailed up the waterway. When the water became too shallow for his boat, Hudson realized that it was only a river. (Today this is called the Hudson River.) But his voyage gave Holland a claim in North America. By 1624, the Dutch had settled in the Hudson Valley.

A year later, in 1610, English merchants paid for Hudson to cross the Atlantic again. Sailing farther north, Hudson reached Canada. He passed through a long, narrow strait into a large body of water. Hudson was sure that he had reached the Pacific Ocean. But, sailing down the coast, he found no opening. Then the waters froze, trapping the ship for the winter. In fact, Hudson had not reached the Pacific. The large body of water was a bay, now called *Hudson Bay*. He drew the first map of Hudson Bay.

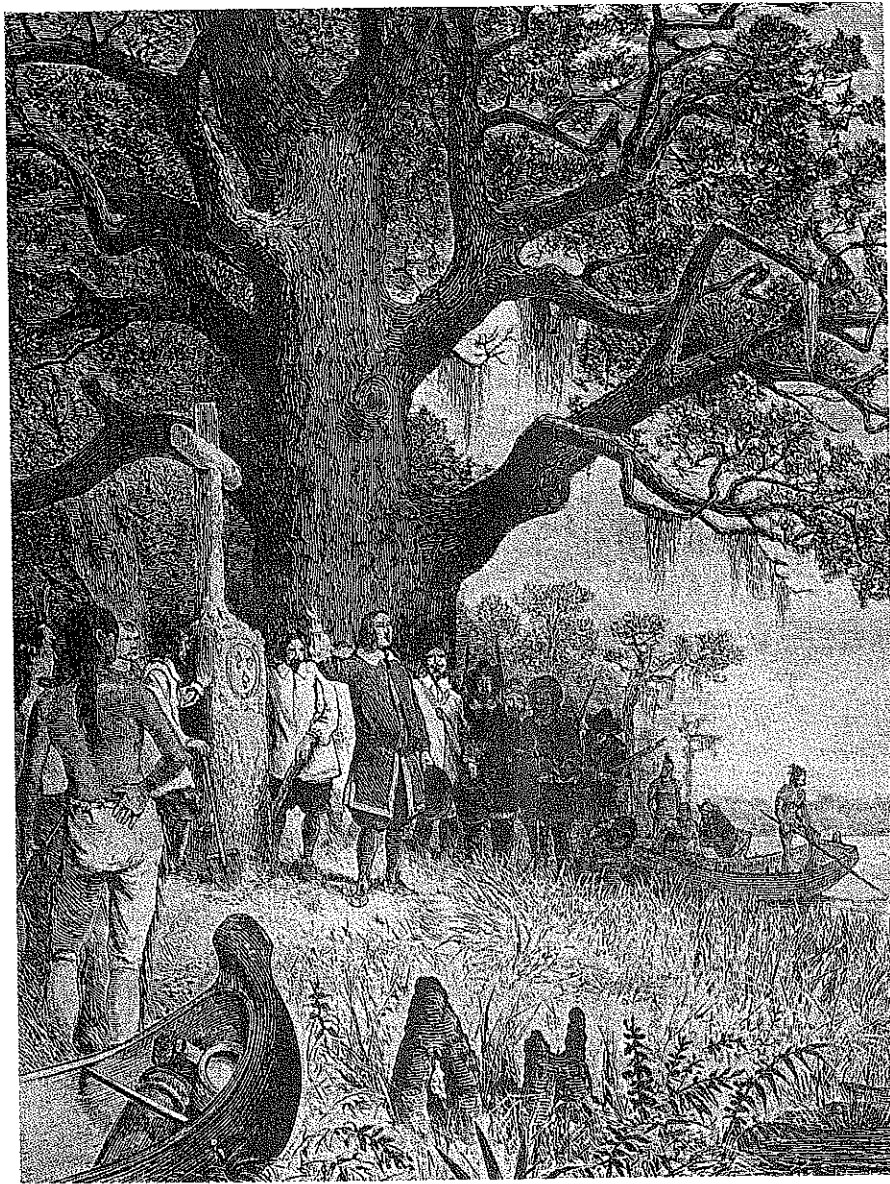
In spring, the crew rebelled again. They set Hudson, his son, and seven others afloat in a small boat with no food. He was never seen again. But his voyage did give England a claim to eastern Canada.



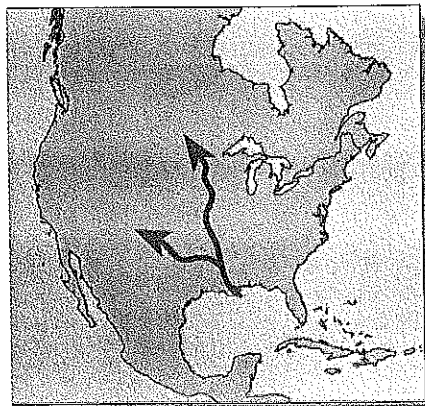
Henry Hudson's ship along the shores of the Hudson River during his first voyage in 1609



Henry Hudson's first voyage to the New World



Robert de La Salle claimed the Mississippi River for France in 1682.



Robert de La Salle's route in the New World

5.9 Robert de La Salle

The French began to settle their territories also. In 1667, Robert de La Salle, a French nobleman, sailed to "New France." As a fur trader along the St. Lawrence River, La Salle learned Indian language and explored the Ohio River. The Indians told him about a great river that flowed all the way south to the Gulf of Mexico.

La Salle dreamed not only of personal wealth but of a French empire of trading posts, forts, and settlements. In 1681, he set out in canoes to travel the Mississippi River. King Louis XIV of France liked the plan, but he wanted La Salle to pay for the journey himself. The governor of Montreal and a wealthy friar agreed to support him. When La Salle reached the mouth of the Mississippi River, he named the vast region Louisiana, for the French king.

La Salle then planned to establish a sea route from France to the Mississippi River. He went to France and received the king's permission. In 1684, he sailed to America with more than 200 settlers. After six months crossing the Atlantic, the ships missed the mouth of the Mississippi. They landed 400 miles to the west.

La Salle founded a colony there, on the coast of what is now Texas. Soon, everyone was starving. La Salle set out on foot for help. Convinced that La Salle was crazy, his own men murdered him. Most of these colonists died, but La Salle had given France claims to the entire Mississippi Valley.