

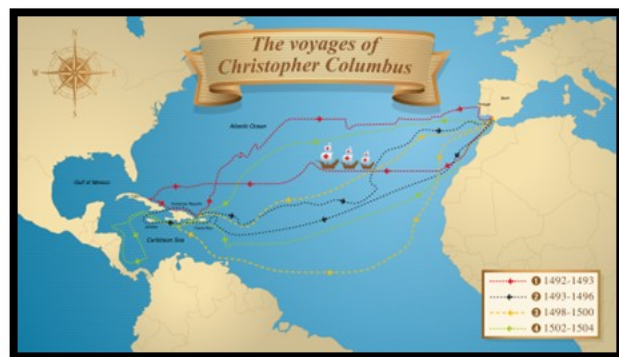
Spanish Exploration

The first attempts at European exploration in the Americas started around the year 1000 CE, when Norse Viking explorers crossed over from Greenland and Iceland. Vikings established a settlement in current day Canada called Vinland. The settlement only lasted for a few years and was later abandoned by the Vikings.

The Voyages of Columbus

Spanish exploration and conquest in the Americas began with Christopher Columbus in 1492. Columbus thought he could reach India in Asia more quickly to obtain spices and luxury items by sailing west around the globe, instead of the longer, more dangerous route around Africa. Columbus underestimated the size of the world and reached not India, but the Americas, specifically an island in the Bahamas. He called the **indigenous** people living there (the Taino) Indians since he originally believed he had found India. He was incorrect, but his new route would change the world.

Columbus made four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean, searching for wealth and building settlements. Columbus sent all the resources he found back to Spain. With him came priests to **convert** the Indigenous people to the Catholic faith, warriors to fight and claim the land, and settlers to build farms.



Initially the Taino welcomed Columbus and the Spanish sailors by giving gifts and feeding them, but that soon changed when Columbus realized what the gifts included - gold. When Columbus realized the wealth he could gain from the indigenous people, Columbus and his sailors required the Taino to dig for gold to bring to the Spanish. If the Taino did not bring enough gold, they were tortured or killed. The Taino rebelled against the Spanish as best they could, but without iron weapons, horses, or guns they were unsuccessful in defeating the Spanish invaders. In less than 100 years after contact, the Taino ceased to exist as a civilization.

Although Columbus was not the first European explorer to reach the Americas, his voyages began the **Columbian Exchange**. The Columbian Exchange refers to the transfer of plants, animals, culture, people, technology, diseases, and ideas between the Americas, Europe, and Africa. The Columbian Exchange was the first-time large groups of people came to the Americas from Europe. They conquered the people living in Central and South America and sent back the wealth they claimed to Europe.

Spanish Conquest

The Conquistadors

Columbus's voyages began a period of European exploration, conquest, and colonization by the Spanish in the Americas. To explore and conquer the land, the Spanish turned to men called **conquistadors**. The conquistadors were allowed to establish settlements and take the wealth of the native population. In return, the Spanish government took part of the treasures they found. The conquistadors gained glory and fame in their home country of Spain.



Conquest of the Aztec and Inca

Stories of gold and great wealth soon inspired conquistadors to come to the Americas. In 1519, Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes started the conquest of present-day Mexico. The Aztecs were a powerful group of people who had built a large and wealthy empire in Mexico. Cortes wanted to conquer the Aztec people and take their wealth back to Spain. After years of Aztec control, many indigenous people in Mexico supported the Spanish invasion. After uniting with the enemies of the Aztecs, Cortes conquered the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. A smallpox **epidemic** had killed many Aztecs, making an attack on the city and invasion easier. The city and the Aztec empire were destroyed.

In 1532, Spanish conquistadors led by Francisco Pizarro encountered the immense Inca Empire: it ruled parts of present-day Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Bolivia, and Colombia. The Inca had skilled generals, veteran soldiers, and massive armies numbering in the tens or hundreds of thousands, but they were not successful fighting against the advanced technology of the Spanish conquistadors. Horses, armor, and weapons gave the conquistadors an advantage over the Inca despite the smaller size of their army. Prior to the Columbian Exchange, there were no horses in South America. Indigenous warriors were terrified of them and ran away. Spanish armor and helmets, made of steel, protected the Spanish soldiers. But the main weapon of the Spanish army was a silent one; disease. Every advanced civilization the Spanish encountered were devastated by the diseases brought over by the Europeans. Within 20 years, the Empire was in ruins and the Spanish were in undisputed possession of the Inca cities and wealth.

Legacy of the Conquered

The legacy of the Aztecs lives on today in Mexico. Many cultural aspects of Mexicans are directly traced back to the Aztec empire. The practice of honoring past ancestors on *Dia de Los Muertos* is an Aztec tradition. Another interesting contribution is popcorn. Aztecs used popcorn not only for eating but also for decorating clothing and other ceremonial embellishments. Advanced medical practices and surgical techniques were also gained from the Aztec empire.

Many of the cultural traditions of the Inca are still found in the Andes. Textile making is still popular, and traditional foods still make up a majority of modern recipes. City sites like Machu Picchu are popular tourist attractions. Even their ancient language, Quechua, is still widely spoken in areas of Peru.