

Worlds Transformed

Summary Analysis

Spanish conquistadors subdued many of the native populations, setting the stage for a Spanish empire in the New World. What were the effects of mixing Spanish, Indian, and African peoples and cultures in the New World?

Video: A Blending of Cultures

Part of the Spanish empire reached into the area we now know as New Mexico. The blending of European and Indian cultures there reflected the dynamics of continuing contact in frontier regions, a process that played a vital role in the shaping of America. Why does cultural blending tend to happen in frontier zones? How is this blending reflected in American society today?

Video script:

Music introduction

David Weber: Peoples who live in frontier zones develop cultures that are a little bit of each; where they borrow from both and at the same time are just a little bit disloyal to each. We have new languages arising along borders, new literatures, new ways of thinking. And to understand America in all of its complexity, I think we do need to understand these frontier regions as much as we understand the heartlands.

Fran Levine: New Mexican culture is very much a blending of the indigenous traditions that were here and traditions brought from Spain, traditions brought from Mexico by both people of new world Spanish ancestry, people of Mexican Indian ancestry. So New Mexican culture has very distinct roots from so many of the traditions of colonial New Mexico, and it's still palpable here in the art traditions, in the architecture, in the food.

Alfred Crosby: My favorite symbol for this is the wheat tortilla. The tortilla is a very

ancient American Indian bread, maize bread; it's corn bread. But somehow or other, very, very early in the game, after the Europeans brought in wheat, somebody somewhere started to make wheat tortillas. And now when you go to the grocery store, you have to make a choice. You can get corn or wheat tortillas.

Stuart Schwartz: They adapted many of the things that the Spanish brought. They learned to use oxen and plows and they learned to adopt the chicken and the pig as part of their way of life, and yet at the same time, they didn't surrender everything that they had before. At the same time, the Spaniards also had to learn from the indigenous peoples. Spaniards who lived on the frontiers of Mexico, in what is today New Mexico and Arizona, learned about adobe and learned about how to hunt and how to use the resources of the areas from indigenous peoples. And so the culture of Spaniards, especially when you got away from the big cities, became also a hybrid culture.

David Weber: The word "frontier" in American history has been one of the most useful and at the same time one of the most controversial terms. In the old sense of the word, the way in which Frederick Jackson Turner led us to think about it, it had this kind of triumphalist edge to it in which white Anglo-American males, largely, moved west into a so-called "virgin land". I think the way we think about the frontier today, frontiers are places where different peoples meet, where two or more cultures come into contact with one another. And the contact may be peaceful, it may be pacific, but we know there are no empty lands out there. There are peoples inhabiting frontier regions and it's the dynamics between those peoples that tend to interest us.

End of video.

Interactive Activity: Authority in America

Control in Colonial times rested in the hands of European rulers who dictated the early exploration and settling of America. A review of the documents included in the following activity will give you insight into how European rulers exercised this authority.

Activity: Check Your Understanding

Focuses on nine edicts and rulings between 1494 and 1737 as examples of how European kings and the Pope ruled affairs in the Americas from their seats of power in Europe. In 1494, the Pope issued the Treaty of Tordesillas to divide the New World between Portugal and Spain, charging them to carry Christianity to the “heathens.” England’s King James chartered more than six million acres and “everything they might contain” to the Virginia Charter Company in London to settle on the coast of Virginia. King Charles I chartered the Massachusetts Bay Company, granting land “from sea to sea” and granted Lord Baltimore land for a colony in the New World. King Charles II granted a charter for a Carolina colony and granted land to his brother James that included parts of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. He also granted a charter to William Penn for part of what became Pennsylvania. As a result, the Penn family took advantage of a so-called “walking purchase” to claim twice as much land as originally agreed upon with the Indians.

Lesson Study Questions

To evaluate your understanding of the lesson topics and prepare for tests, consider how you would answer these questions:

1. How and why was Cortés able to conquer Mexico?
 - What technological advantages did Cortés have?
 - How and why was he able to get help from some of the indigenous peoples?
2. Explain the role Portugal played in the age of European exploration.
 - Where was Portugal located?
 - Why did Portugal encourage voyages around Africa?
 - What technological advances are associated with Portugal’s efforts?
3. How and why did a geographic revolution take place in the sixteenth century?
 - How did mapmakers depict the world prior to this time?
 - How did Martin Waldseemüller map the world? What information did he have?
 - What effect did the European "discovery" of the Pacific Ocean have?

4. Why did Spain become the dominant European power in the New World in the sixteenth century?
 - What areas did Spain colonize? By what authority?
 - What resources in the Americas did Spain use to its advantage?
 - How were they able to control and use the native peoples?

5. Why did Spain establish settlements in areas that became Florida and New Mexico?
 - How would a colony in Florida solidify its claim and protect its ships?
 - What were the Spanish seeking in New Mexico? What did they end up doing there?

6. Describe and explain the meaning of the Columbian exchange. How did both the Old and New Worlds experience gains and losses because of the exchange? Which world benefited the most? Why? In what ways does the exchange continue today?
 - What is the Columbian exchange?
 - How did New World food products, crops, and mineral resources affect Europe and Asia?
 - How did diseases affect both areas?
 - Did the New World gain anything from Europe? What?
 - How does the exchange of organisms continue?

7. During the sixteenth century, Spain became the most powerful country in both Europe and the Americas. How and why did this happen? How did Spain transform America? How is the Spanish influence still visible in the United States today?
 - What geographic advantages did Spain have?
 - How did Spain use the resources it gained in the Americas?
 - Why was Spain able to establish its empire? What parts of their culture did they impose?
 - How is the influence reflected in people, language, religion, architecture, etc.?