

Chapter 25: New Worlds: The Americas and Oceania

Overview

This chapter traces the devastating impact of European exploration and conquest on the societies in the Americas and on the Pacific islands. Those societies succumbed quickly under the combined pressures of European diseases and superior technology. By 1700, most of the western hemisphere had been claimed by western powers. Colonial societies were shaped by a number of considerations:

- Conquests of the Aztec empire by Cortés and the Inca empire by Pizarro were swift and brutal. The Spanish empire brought the Indian empires of Mexico and Peru under royal authority, represented by the viceroy, and a small class of white landowners. Indigenous peoples were impressed into service in mines and on plantations.
- In Brazil, the Portuguese established a plantation society based on sugar mills. After the native population died off, African slaves were imported and forced to labor under brutal conditions.
- The earliest British and French colonies in North America centered on the fur trade and subsistence farming. Plantations in Virginia and the Carolinas were originally worked by indentured servants from Europe, but by the late seventeenth century, planters found African slaves to be a better investment.
- Catholic missions in Spanish and Portuguese colonies actively sought the conversion of native peoples. In North America, there were fewer contacts and more native resistance to conversion.

Chapter Outline

I. Colliding worlds

A. The Spanish Caribbean

1. Indigenous peoples were the Taino
 - a. Lived in small villages under authority of chiefs
 - b. Showed little resistance to European visitors
2. Columbus built the fort of Santo Domingo, capital of the Spanish Caribbean
 - a. Taino conscripted to mine gold
 - b. *Encomiendas*: land grants to Spanish settlers with total control over local people
 - c. Brutal abuses plus smallpox brought decline of Taino populations

B. The Conquest of Mexico and Peru

1. Hernan Cortés
 - a. Aztec and Inca societies wealthier, more complex than Caribbean societies
 - b. With 450 men, Cortés conquered the Aztec empire, 1519-1521
 - c. Tribal resentment against the Mexica helped Cortés
 - d. Epidemic disease (smallpox) also aided Spanish efforts
2. Francisco Pizarro
 - a. Led a small band of men and toppled the Inca empire, 1532-1533
 - b. Internal problems and smallpox aided Pizarro's efforts
 - c. By 1540 Spanish forces controlled all the former Inca empire

C. Iberian Empires in the Americas

1. Spanish colonial administration formalized by 1570
 - a. Administrative centers in Mexico and Peru governed by viceroys
 - b. Viceroys reviewed by *audiencias*, courts appointed by the king
 - c. Viceroys had sweeping powers within jurisdictions
2. Portuguese Brazil: given to Portugal by Treaty of Tordesillas
 - a. Portuguese king granted Brazil to nobles, with a governor to oversee
 - b. Sugar plantations by mid-sixteenth century
3. Colonial American society

- a. European-style society in cities, indigenous culture persisted in rural areas
 - b. More exploitation of New World than settlement
 - c. Still, many Iberian migrants settled in the Americas, 1500-1800
- D. Settler Colonies in North America**
1. Foundation of colonies on east coast, exploration of west coast
 - a. France and England came seeking fur, fish, trade routes in the early seventeenth century
 - b. Settlements suffered isolation, food shortages
 2. Colonial government different from Iberian colonies
 - a. North American colonies controlled by private investors with little royal backing
 - b. Royal authority and royal governors, but also institutions of self-government
 3. Relations with indigenous peoples
 - a. Settlers' farms interrupted the migrations of indigenous peoples
 - b. Settlers seized lands, then justified with treaties
 - c. Natives retaliated with raids on farms and villages
 - d. Attacks on European communities brought reprisals from settlers
 - e. Between 1500 and 1800, native population of North America dropped 90 percent

II. Colonial society in the Americas

A. The Formation of Multicultural Societies

1. In Spanish and Portuguese settlements, *mestizo* societies emerged
 - a. Peoples of varied ancestry lived together under European rule
 - b. *Mestizo*: the children of Spanish and Portuguese men and native women
 - c. Society of Brazil more thoroughly mixed: *mestizos*, *mulattoes*, *zambos*
2. Typically the social (and racial) hierarchy in Iberian colonies was as follows:
 - a. Whites (*peninsulares* and *criollos*) owned the land and held the power
 - b. Mixed races (*mestizos* and *zambos*) performed much of the manual labor
 - c. Africans and natives were at the bottom
3. North American societies
 - a. Greater gender balance among settlers allowed marriage within their own groups
 - b. Relationships of French traders and native women generated some *métis*
 - c. English disdainful of interracial marriages
 - d. Cultural borrowing: plants, crops, deerskin clothes

B. Mining and Agriculture in the Spanish Empire

1. Silver more plentiful than gold, the basis of Spanish New World wealth
 - a. Conquistadores melted Aztec and Inca gold artifacts into ingots
 - b. Two major sites of silver mining: Zacatecas (Mexico) and Potosi (Peru)
2. The global significance of silver
 - a. One-fifth of all silver mined went to royal Spanish treasury (the *quinto*)
 - b. Paid for Spanish military and bureaucracy
 - c. Passed on to European and then to Asian markets for luxury trade goods
3. Large private estates, or haciendas, were the basis of Spanish American production
 - a. Produced foodstuffs for local production
 - b. Abusive *encomienda* system replaced by the *repartimiento* system

- c. *Repartimiento* system replaced by free laborers by the mid-seventeenth century
 - 4. Resistance to Spanish rule by indigenous people
 - a. Various forms of resistance: rebellion, indolence, retreat
 - b. Difficult for natives to register complaints: Poma de Ayala's attempt
- C. Sugar and Slavery in Portuguese Brazil**
 - 1. The Portuguese empire in Brazil dependent on sugar production
 - a. Colonial Brazilian life revolved around the sugar mill, or *engenho*
 - b. *Engenho* combined agricultural and industrial enterprises
 - c. Sugar planters became the landed nobility
 - 2. Growth of slavery in Brazil
 - a. Native peoples of Brazil were not cultivators; they resisted farm labor
 - b. Smallpox and measles reduced indigenous population
 - c. Imported African slaves for cane and sugar production after 1530
 - d. High death rate and low birth rate fed constant demand for more slaves
 - e. Roughly, every ton of sugar cost one human life
- D. Fur Traders and Settlers in North America**
 - 1. The fur trade was very profitable
 - 2. Native peoples trapped for and traded with Europeans
 - 3. Impact of the fur trade
 - a. Environmental impact
 - b. Conflicts among natives competing for resources
 - 4. European settler-cultivators posed more serious threat to native societies
 - a. Cultivation of cash crops--tobacco, rice, indigo, and later, cotton
 - b. Indentured labor flocked to North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries
 - 5. African slaves replaced indentured servants in the late seventeenth century
 - a. Slave labor not yet prominent in North America (lack of labor-intensive crops)
 - b. New England merchants participated in slave trade, distillation of rum
- E. Christianity and Native Religions in the Americas**
 - 1. Spanish missionaries introduced Catholicism
 - a. Mission schools and churches established
 - b. Some missionaries recorded the languages and traditions of native peoples
 - c. Native religions survived but the Catholic Church attracted many converts
 - 2. In 1531, the Virgin of Guadalupe became a national symbol
 - 3. French and English missions less successful
 - a. North American populations not settled or captive
 - b. English colonists had little interest in converting indigenous peoples
 - c. French missionaries worked actively, but met only modest success