

Focus Activity

READ TO LEARN

What was life like in New Spain?

VOCABULARY

- encomienda
- missionary

PEOPLE

- Estevanico
- Fray Marcos de Niza
- Bartolomé de La Casas
- Yanga

PLACES

- New Spain
- Mexico City

LESSON 3



The Spanish Build An Empire

Read Aloud

On an October night in 1521, Spaniards destroyed the city of Tenochtitlán. A large and powerful empire had come to an end. What would take its place? What would life be like for the conquerors and the people they now ruled?

THE BIG PICTURE

In the early 1500s the colony of **New Spain** included the lands of the Aztec, the Maya, and other peoples of the Americas. **Mexico City**, the new name for Tenochtitlán, was the capital of the colony.

New Spain covered much of the Caribbean islands, Central America, and the present-day country of Mexico. It stretched north into what are now the southwestern United States and Florida.

As a way of settling and controlling this huge region, Spain began granting Spanish colonists **encomiendas** (en koh mee EN dahs). An encomienda was a large area of land that included Indian villages. The encomienda system helped New Spain's colonists to prosper. It also caused much suffering to the Indians who lived there and to the Africans later brought by force from their homes across the Atlantic Ocean. As you read the lesson, you will find out what kind of life the Spanish colonists made for themselves in New Spain.

THE GROWTH OF NEW SPAIN

After Spain's defeat of the Aztec empire, conquistadors spread through much of North America and South America to find more land and riches for Spain. The map on this page shows which areas became part of New Spain.

Spain Conquers the Maya

About five years after Tenochtitlán fell, Spanish soldiers headed southeast to the Yucatán peninsula to find Maya treasures. You read about the Maya in Chapter 3. Their strong fighters and the thick rain forest environment helped the Maya to defend parts of their land for 20 years. But by 1546 the Maya, like the Aztec, fell under Spanish rule.

To the Maya's horror the Spanish burned their valuable collection of books that contained their knowledge of history, math, and science.

In one act much of Maya civilization went up in smoke. Only three Maya books written before the Spanish conquest survive today.

Francisco Coronado Searches for Gold

In 1540 the young conquistador Francisco Coronado led a group of Spaniards, Africans, and Indians on a search for gold in what is now the southwestern United States. For two years Coronado looked for the Seven Cities of Gold. An African scout, **Estevanico** (ays tay VAH nee koh), and a Spanish priest who was called **Fray Marcos de Niza** had looked for golden cities during an earlier expedition. But before they could find them Estevanico was killed.

Fray Marcos lived to tell what had happened and went on to join Coronado on his expedition. Coronado did not find the Seven Cities of Gold. They did not really exist.

NEW SPAIN, About 1600



MAP WORK

By 1600, New Spain included a vast area in the Americas.

1. What islands shown on the map were part of New Spain?
2. How far south did New Spain stretch?
3. What parts of the present-day United States were part of New Spain?

BUILDING NEW SPAIN

For the Indians life became very difficult. The harshness began with the encomienda system. This system was similar to slavery but had one difference. The colonists agreed to care for the Indians and to teach them about Christianity.

Indians worked from dawn to dusk. Sometimes they were even whipped. Often they were sick and hungry. When the Spanish found silver in the mountains of Mexico, Indians were sent to work there. The silver the Indians mined helped make Spain one of the richest and most powerful countries in Europe.

"Protector of the Indians"

One of the defenders of Indian rights was a Catholic priest named **Bartolomé de Las Casas**. Las Casas came to New Spain as a **missionary** to the Indians in the early 1500s. A missionary is a person who teaches his or her religion to others who have different beliefs. Las Casas was given his own encomienda in Hispaniola in 1513. Las Casas treated the Indians in his encomienda well. He saw how cruelly other encomienda owners acted.

In 1514 Las Casas gave up his encomienda. For the next 50 years Las Casas tried to end the encomiendas. He was known as the "Protector of the Indians." This excerpt is from one of his books. What reasons does he give for his



MANY VOICES PRIMARY SOURCE

Excerpt from
History of the Indies,
completed by
Bartolomé de Las Casas in 1563.

Tell me, by what right or justice do you hold these Indians in such a cruel and horrible **servitude**? On what authority have you [tried to destroy] these peoples, who dwell quietly and peaceably on their own land? . . . Why do you keep them so **oppressed** and exhausted, without giving them enough to eat or curing them of the sicknesses they [get] from the excessive labor you give them, and they die, or rather, you kill them, in order to extract and acquire gold every day?

And what care do you take that they should be instructed in religion, so that they may know their God and creator, may be baptized, may hear Mass, and may keep [observe] Sundays and feast days? Are these not men? . . . Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves? Do you not understand this? Don't you feel this?

servitude: slavery
oppressed: cruelly, or unjustly, controlled

opinions? Because of his work, the king of Spain passed the "New Laws of 1542," which said that Indians could no longer be made to work without pay. The encomienda system ended by about 1800.

Slavery in New Spain

Scholars disagree about the number of Indians living in Mexico in 1519. Estimates range from 8 to 30 million. By 1568 the population had dropped to less than 3 million. This human tragedy was due to disease as well as overwork. Enslaving Africans became the cruel solution to the desire for more workers.

African captives had been a part of Spain's empire since its earliest days. Yet enslaved Africans were not brought to New Spain in large numbers until the Indians began to die out. By 1570 over 200,000 Africans had been taken to New Spain. Most were brought to such islands as Cuba and Hispaniola to grow sugarcane.

Enslaved Africans also worked in the mines. At Veracruz and Acapulco, they loaded silver and other goods onto the treasure ships bound for Spain.

Diego Rivera, a Mexican artist, painted *Disembarkation of the Spanish at Vera Cruz* in 1951. Many captive Indians and Africans were held in shackles (above, right).

Some Captives Break Free

By law, enslaved Africans in New Spain could make money in their spare time to buy their freedom. But African captives also escaped. In the 1560s and 1570s, Africans and Indians rose up against the Spanish people.

In 1609 about 600 Spanish soldiers were sent to the mountains around Veracruz to recapture an elderly African slave named **Yanga** and over 80 of his followers. After 30 years the Africans still had not been captured. The government then left Yanga and his followers alone. They later established a town, San Lorenzo de los Negros.



COLONIAL MEXICO CITY

In addition to working on farms and ranches and in mines, Indians were also forced to build New Spain's capital, Mexico City. In early 1522 Hernando Cortés decided that "it was well to rebuild" Tenochtitlán. In the process almost all the Aztec features of the city were destroyed.

Where the Great Temple had stood, Cortés began building a cathedral, or huge church. Most cities in Spain had a cathedral and government buildings arranged around a central plaza. Cortés wanted Mexico City to have wide streets going out from the Great Plaza.

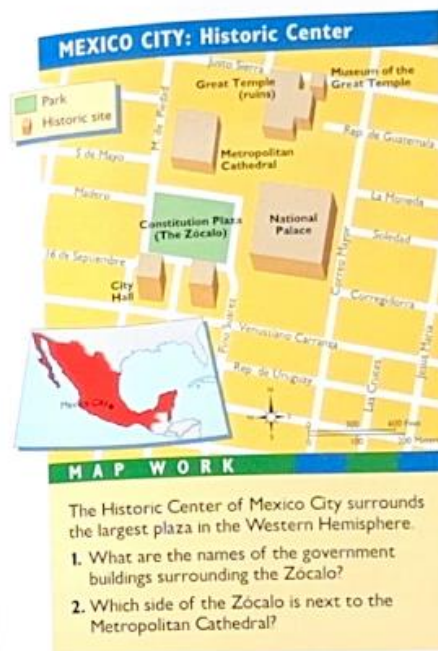
A Walk Through Mexico City

At dawn, long ago Mexico City was full of activity. Through the morning mist Indians paddled across Lake Texcoco in long boats loaded with goods. They carried vegetables, hay for horses, pottery, firewood, and other goods to the markets and shops. Most of the local goods were sold at the market on the Great Plaza together with goods from Spain, China, and the Netherlands. "Everything that is best in Spain comes to this square," wrote one Spaniard.

The National Palace is one of the buildings the Spanish erected during colonial times. It is located on the Zócalo on the former site of Moctezuma's palace.

Spaniards first arriving in Mexico City marveled at the fine houses and wide streets. Look at the map of today's Mexico City on page 161. Find Constitution Plaza. Today it is called the Zócalo (ZOH kah loh), an Aztec word for "plaza."

By 1554 Mexico City had many of the features of a European city. Some people even said it was very much like Venice, Italy. There were mansions, flowering parks, schools, and a university. Mexico City also had a theater, post office, and printing press. Most of the books printed there had to do with Catholic teachings.



The Historic Center of Mexico City surrounds the largest plaza in the Western Hemisphere.

1. What are the names of the government buildings surrounding the Zócalo?
2. Which side of the Zócalo is next to the Metropolitan Cathedral?

Mexico City had schools, convents, and many other buildings owned by the Catholic Church. As a Catholic friar wrote, Mexico City was "the noblest and most imposing city in New Spain." Many colonists agreed with him.

WHY IT MATTERS

From the ashes of the Aztec empire came a different civilization—New Spain. Spain built an empire in the Americas. The cost in suffering was high. The Indian culture gave way to the culture of Spain. But as you will read in the Legacy on pages 162–163, Indian ways are still found in Mexico City today.

Reviewing Facts and Ideas

SUM IT UP

- As the conquistadors searched for land and gold, they helped to expand New Spain to the Caribbean islands, Central America, Mexico, and those areas now part of the southwestern and southeastern United States.
- Spain began the encomienda system in which thousands of Indians died from overwork. The priest Bartolomé de Las Casas called for the end of the encomiendas. Thousands of African captives were brought to New Spain to replace the dying Indians.
- Colonial Mexico City was built to resemble cities in Spain. Some buildings and streets from this time can still be found today.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Who benefited the most from the encomiendas? Who was hurt?
2. How did enslaved Africans contribute to life in New Spain?
3. **FOCUS** What was life like in New Spain for the Indians, their Spanish conquerors, and the Africans brought as slaves?
4. **THINKING SKILL** What *effect* did Las Casas have on life in New Spain? What could have been done by others to help the Indians? Give reasons for your answer.
5. **WRITE** Suppose that you are Las Casas, a colonist running an encomienda, or an Indian working on one. Write a letter to the king of Spain explaining what you think about the encomienda system.