

# THE PEOPLING OF AMERICA: A SYNOPTIC HISTORY

*A Historical Perspective*

From the Americans All<sup>®</sup> Resource Materials

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**Americans All<sup>®</sup>** A National Education Program

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## Spanish Entry into the Southwest

The meeting of Europeans and Mexican Indians began in 1511, when 18 shipwrecked Spanish adventurers landed on the Yucatán coast of Mexico. When Fernando “Hernán”

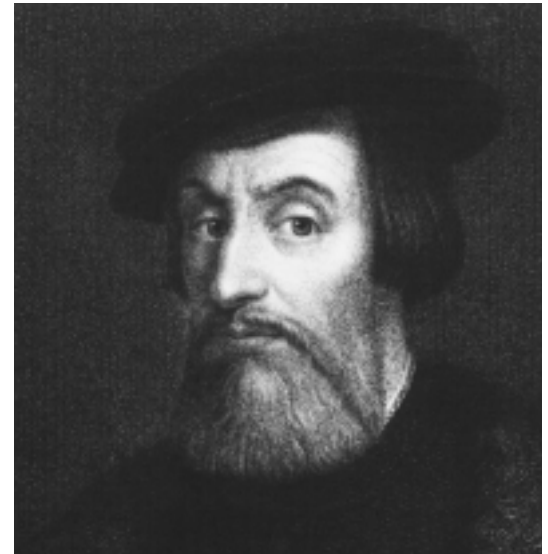
Cortés landed on the island of Cozumel in 1519, he rescued one of the survivors, Jeronimo de Aguilar, but Jeronimo’s companion, Gonzalo de Guerrero, had assimilated thoroughly into Mayan society and thus rejected all offers to return with the Spaniards. De Guerrero had married the daughter of the Mayan chief Nachan Can and had assumed a position of power in the Mayan community. It is believed that the intermarriage of Europeans and Indians began with the de Aguilar and de Guerrero contact. Cortés’ soldiers also fathered children with Indian women, and their children continued to mix Spanish and Indian genes.

By 1510 Spaniards had introduced enslaved Africans into the Caribbean islands as laborers to replace the native population being decimated by European diseases. Following the conquest of Mexico, Spaniards introduced enslaved Africans to that region, thus adding a third racial stock to middle America. This mixing of Spaniards (themselves of varied ethnic stocks), Native Americans (the primary group) and, at times, Africans, produced a new people in Mexico, now often called *la raza*, the race.

Awareness of deep native cultural traditions is one reason many Mexican Americans prefer not to be called Hispanic or Spanish, terms that recognize only their European component. The term Latino, while less specific, also emphasizes only the Mediterranean element of Mexican Americans’ ethnic heritage. What to call the people who emerged from the intermingling of bloods that followed the conquest of Mexico has been debated frequently, but no consensus has been reached. However, Mexican American and Mexican are the terms most often used by this group.

While the devastating Spanish conquest was under way in Central America and Peru, the native North American populations remained unaffected. Their relative isolation did not last. Soon, Spaniards, English, French and Dutch proceeded with the colonization of North America, bringing dramatic changes on this vast land and its first inhabitants.

By 1536 a few shipwrecked Spaniards under Cabeza de Vaca had struggled across what is now the southern United States and returned to Mexico. In 1540 Francisco Vázquez de Coronado’s expedition, seeking fabled riches, reached what is now Kansas. In 1565



*Fernando “Hernán” Cortés*

a group fortified a site named San Agustín (St. Augustine) on the coast of Florida to protect ships carrying American treasures to imperial Spain. At that time missions in present-day Georgia sought to convert Indians to Catholicism. Spain claimed much of North America from Canada south to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico. Below lay Central and South America, with lands claimed by Spain and Portugal.

The United States Southwest was a land subjugated not by *conquistadors* (Spanish soldiers or conquerors) but by well-disciplined farmers, ranchers and miners of Spanish and Indian heritage. After several attempts to find cities of gold proved unsuccessful, the Spanish monarchy acquiesced to actually establishing colonies in this region. Thus, before English travelers landed at Plymouth Rock, Hispanos had founded Santa Fé and Spain had undertaken the exploration of other western portions of the North American continent. Even though aided by thousands of soldiers, priests and civilians, colonization of this vast region required nearly two centuries.

New Mexico, like Florida, was a region where Spain's early efforts to colonize had some success, in part because Spaniards and *mestizos* (people of combined Native American and Spanish ethnicity) forced local Indians to supply food, labor and equipment. Spain was set on finding rich mines, converting Indians to Christianity and teaching them to live like Europeans. In 1598 Juan de Oñate, a wealthy heir to a silver mining family of northern Mexico and a grandson of the daughter of Montezuma, led a group of Spanish, *mestizos* and Mexican Indians, including soldiers, colonists and priests, to establish a capital next to a *pueblo* Indian village on the Rio Grande. In 1610 the Spaniards moved the government seat into the hills to a place they called Santa Fé (Holy Faith). In the colonization of New Mexico, the Juan de Oñate party sought mining opportunities. Other groups migrated in small wagon caravans followed by horses, mules and cattle. First Texas, then California, Arizona and Colorado followed the example of the colonization of New Mexico, but each in a distinct way.

## Africans with Spanish Explorers

Africans came, established homes and colonized parts of this country with the Spanish explorers even before the establishment of the first English colonies. The captain of one ship in Columbus' first

voyage to America was African, and Africans participated in many of Columbus' landings. A first effort by the Spaniards, who claimed the East Coast as far north as Connecticut for the Spanish monarchy, was to establish a colony in 1526 at San Miguel de Gualdape, somewhere along the North Carolina coast. Led by Vázquez de Allyón, the expedition failed after six months, partly due to Africans escaping the colony and making their homes with local Indians. After Allyón's death, the ship was remounted and the colonists returned to Hispaniola. Africans there had been replacing the dying native population as enslaved labor at the suggestion of Dominican Friar Bartholome de las Casas. His intervention with the Spanish monarchy on behalf of the native Taino population on Hispaniola and the subsequent importation of Africans to the island by Frey Nicolas de Ovando marked the beginning of African enslavement and labor use in the Americas.

From 1527 to 1539, parts of the American Southwest, particularly Arizona and New Mexico, were explored by Estevanico, or little Stephen, an enslaved African who served as interpreter and scout for Cabeza de Vaca but subsequently took hold of the party when natives killed its leader. Other Africans were part of the crews and expeditions of Ponce de León, Hernando de Soto and Menéndez de Avilés. Under the Spaniards free and enslaved Africans helped build and defend St. Augustine, Florida.

Throughout North America, Indian peoples developed lifestyles compatible with their environment while endeavoring to live in harmony with nature. Their ethics, myths and traditions across the continent reflected a deeply rooted belief in, and respect for, unity and kinship with all aspects of creation. Many tribes also believed in a single powerful spiritual force from which all things had originated and that could manifest itself in all forms of nature.

## Indian Nations: Unity and Diversity

Although Native American cultures had an underlying unity of character and world view, they varied considerably in adaptation to the continent's diverse environments. Before the Europeans' disruptive intrusions, numerous and densely populated Indian chiefdoms in the Southeast were successfully utilizing the rich river valleys of the interior and the resources of the coastal plains. To the north other tribes, such as the Cherokee, cultivated large corn fields. In the arid Southwest, corn was the main staple for the more than 100 individual *pueblos* that dotted the region. In neighboring California, an area characterized by great linguistic diversity, fish, acorns and pine nuts supplemented much of the diet, along with small game, though it was less abundant than in the Great Basin.

The Indians of the Plateau relied on exploiting their salmon-rich rivers, hunting and gathering. Like the Basin's Shoshone, Utes and Northern Paiutes after the introduction of the horse, many Plateau tribes began venturing onto the Plains to hunt the bison. Exploitation of a rich ecosystem and a dense population characterized the Northwest Coast, where food supplies were generally abundant from sea and land. An environment less hospitable was typical of the Arctic regions, where Aleuts and Inuit (Eskimos) thrived as skilled fishermen and sea-mammal hunters.



*The acquisition of the horse increased Native Americans' ability to migrate.*

To the south of the Arctic, stretching across Canada, the Subarctic Indians relied on hunting, fishing and trapping for their subsistence. Further south the Great Plains were home to semisedentary village tribes, ancestors of the historic Hidatsa, Mandan, Arikara and Pawnee, who practiced horticulture and hunted bison on foot before obtaining horses. With the acquisition of the horse, this region experienced an unprecedented cultural revolution that saw the emergence of such tribes as the Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Sioux, Crow and Blackfoot. Finally, the Indians of the northeast and woodland regions, besides hunting, fishing and gathering, cultivated corn, tobacco and other products that European colonists soon adopted.

## Early English Colonization

The first English to establish a permanent colony in what is now the United States arrived in the region of present-day Virginia in 1607. The 104 survivors of the Atlantic crossing began building their colony 30 miles inland from the mouth of the river they named in honor of their king, James I of England. The newcomers soon fell on desperately hard times, in part because their expectations about the “New World” were misleading. They had hoped to duplicate the experiences of the Spanish who had found, in Central and South America, gold and silver as well as large, stable populations of conquerable natives. The English colonists, however, discovered neither valuable minerals nor a short-cut route that would lead them to Asia. Moreover, the natives, though willing to trade with the English, resisted them or faded into the forests when threatened with subjugation.

The hardships suffered in Virginia taught the English colonists important lessons. The region of America they had reached could offer prosperity, but not if it were just the site for outposts coordinating the exploitation of local labor and resources. The colonists had to be willing to establish self-supporting communities of people farming and performing the other ordinary tasks done in the villages and towns of Europe. Indeed, some people might even earn riches by providing—not only for nearby but also for faraway markets—tobacco, rice, fish, furs and other products that could be grown or found more easily in America than in Europe.



*The arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*

## Learning Activity 1: Diversity and Communities

**Activity Goal.** To explore the concept of “community” as it relates to the experiences of diverse groups.

**Appreciation Objective.** By identifying images and scenes that depict community activity in different ethnic and/or cultural groups, students will increase their appreciation for diversity in United States history.

**Basic Information Objective.** Students will review the definitions of “community” and “diversity” and identify timeline events that relate to community life among diverse groups.

**Critical- and Creative-Thinking Objective.** Students will analyze photographic images to identify indicators of community activities and will compare and contrast images from diverse groups.

**Preparation.** Select photographs representing communities and the ethnic and/or cultural groups emphasized in the Americans All® program from the Americans All® Photograph Collection or from magazines or other library resources.

**Conducting the Activity.** Write the words “community” and “diversity” on the chalkboard and begin the activity by leading a brief discussion to define these concepts.

Divide the class into teams. Distribute a set of the selected photographs to each student team and have each team discuss the concepts of community and diversity as they relate to these photographs. Ask the students to notice settings, activities, people and periods.

Reassemble the class and have each student identify a timeline event that relates to the concept of community and/or diversity. Have students explain why they chose their selected event.

## Learning Activity 2: Images and Concepts

**Activity Goal.** To reinforce key concepts and their meanings.

**Appreciation Objective.** Students will identify specific photographic images that relate to the following key concepts: immigrate, migrate, family, diversity, ethnic group and culture.

**Basic Information Objective.** Students will work in teams to identify or relate key concepts on the timeline and discuss the definitions and word meanings.

**Critical- and Creative-Thinking Objective.** Students will offer divergent ideas, make inferences and manage their team’s processes as they brainstorm on the six key concepts, using examples from the timeline and selected photographic images.

**Preparation.** Select a variety of photographs representing the ethnic and/or cultural groups emphasized in the Americans All® program from the Americans All® Photograph Collection or from magazines or other library resources.

**Conducting the Activity.** Write the following words on the chalkboard: “migrate,” “immigrate,” “family,” “culture,” “ethnic group” and “diversity.”



Divide the class into teams and distribute selected photographic images. Give members of each team one of the six key concepts to discuss among themselves. Have each team select a reporter to tell the class how its concept is depicted in the image.

Continue the activity by reading some entries from the timeline and discussing the timeline format with the class. Select one period and read an entry for each of the ethnic and/or cultural groups emphasized in the Americans All® program.

Conclude the activity by asking the students to create timelines of their own lives, their community and/or their families.

## Learning Activity 3: People in Time

**Activity Goal.** To explore the history of America as the history of diverse ethnic and/or cultural groups.

**Appreciation Objective.** Students will develop an increased awareness of diversity as a basic American reality.

**Basic Information Objective.** Students will explore history and answer key questions about different ethnic and/or cultural groups.

**Critical- and Creative-Thinking Objective.** Students will compare and contrast moments in the histories of diverse ethnic and/or cultural groups and draw conclusions about group similarities and/or differences.

**Preparation.** Locate and copy background information on each of the groups emphasized in the Americans All® program. Copies of the student background essays or the ethnic and cultural group books, found in the Americans All® Resource Materials, may be used, or excerpts from this publication.

**Conducting the Activity.** Divide the class into six teams and have each team read background information representing one of the groups emphasized in the Americans All® program. Next, ask each team to find timeline events relating to the ethnic and/or cultural group it has just read about.

Have each team's reporter share with the class what his or her team has learned about the ethnic and/or cultural group it has read about, along with two or three related timeline entries. Conclude the activity with a class discussion about the similarities and/or differences among the diverse ethnic and/or cultural groups' experiences.

## Learning Activity 4: Characters in Time

**Activity Goal.** To create personal journal entries that relate to specific timeline events.

**Appreciation Objective.** Students will develop a greater empathy and understanding about the impact that events and circumstances may have had on the lives of individuals in history.

**Basic Information Objective.** Students will increase their awareness of specific events that affected people in diverse communities.

**Critical- and Creative-Thinking Objective.** Students will write creatively and develop characters who might have experienced a specific historic event.

**Preparation.** Create index cards with selected timeline events that relate to the period and content areas on which students are currently focusing.

Create a brief sample journal entry of a fictitious character that relates to a timeline event. Make sure the journal entry reveals the feelings, fears, joys and thoughts of the character.

**Conducting the Activity.** Demonstrate the activity by reading the sample journal entry and the related timeline event. Pass out a timeline event index card to all students and tell them to read it over silently. Next, divide the class into small groups to brainstorm about fictitious characters they might create relating to their timeline event. Allow time enough for each group member to share his or her ideas.

Reassemble the class and have each student write his or her fictitious character's journal entry. The entry should be one to two pages long. Conclude the activity by having students read their entries to the class.

## Learning Activity 5: A Moment in Time

**Activity Goal.** To compare timeline events that had an impact on diverse ethnic and/or cultural groups during one specific period.

**Appreciation Objective.** Students will increase their awareness of, and appreciation for, the value of multiple perspectives when looking at historical events.

**Basic Information Objective.** Students will increase their knowledge about diversity in specific historic periods.

**Critical- and Creative-Thinking Objective.** Students will compare and analyze timeline events that relate to diverse ethnic and/or cultural groups in specific periods.

**Conducting the Activity.** Begin the activity by assigning a passage from a history or social studies text for the students to read. Then, determine with the class the period and ethnic and/or cultural group(s) emphasized in the passage. Have students locate timeline events to read aloud from each related ethnic and/or cultural group column during the selected period.

Have a student record a key word or phrase on the chalkboard for each ethnic and/or cultural group.

Next, lead a class discussion comparing and contrasting timeline events and circumstances. Include possible cause-and-effect relationships in the discussion. Also consider how specific factors may have had an impact on other circumstances.

Close the activity by giving the following assignment. Ask each student to find a current event in the newspaper and identify at least two different perspectives on that event as well as cause-and-effect factors that have possible impact or influence on his or her selected current event.