

The route of Hernán Cortés from Cuba to Mexico City

## 5.5 Hernán Cortés

Spaniards looking for gold heard stories of a rich Mexican empire. In 1519, Hernán Cortés, a Spanish nobleman living in Cuba, sailed to Mexico to conquer a native people called the Aztecs. He wanted adventure, gold, and silver.

Cortés first met the Aztecs on the exact day that the Aztecs believed a god would attack them. Thinking Cortés was this god, they sent gold to convince him to leave. The gold just made Cortés more determined to conquer them.

Cortés marched to the Aztec capital, a beautiful city on an island in a lake where Mexico City is today. When the emperor invited him in, Cortés took the emperor prisoner.

For six months, Cortés quietly held the Aztec emperor prisoner in his own city. Then, after a short trip away from the Aztec capital, Cortés returned. As he entered the city, the Aztecs attacked. Cortés and his army were surrounded by fierce Aztec warriors. The Spaniards fled the city. Before leaving, they stuffed their pockets with gold. Many of them were so heavily weighed down with gold that they drowned in the dark waters of the lake.

After their defeat, the Spaniards surrounded the Aztec capital for nearly a year. Many of the Aztecs had been weak-

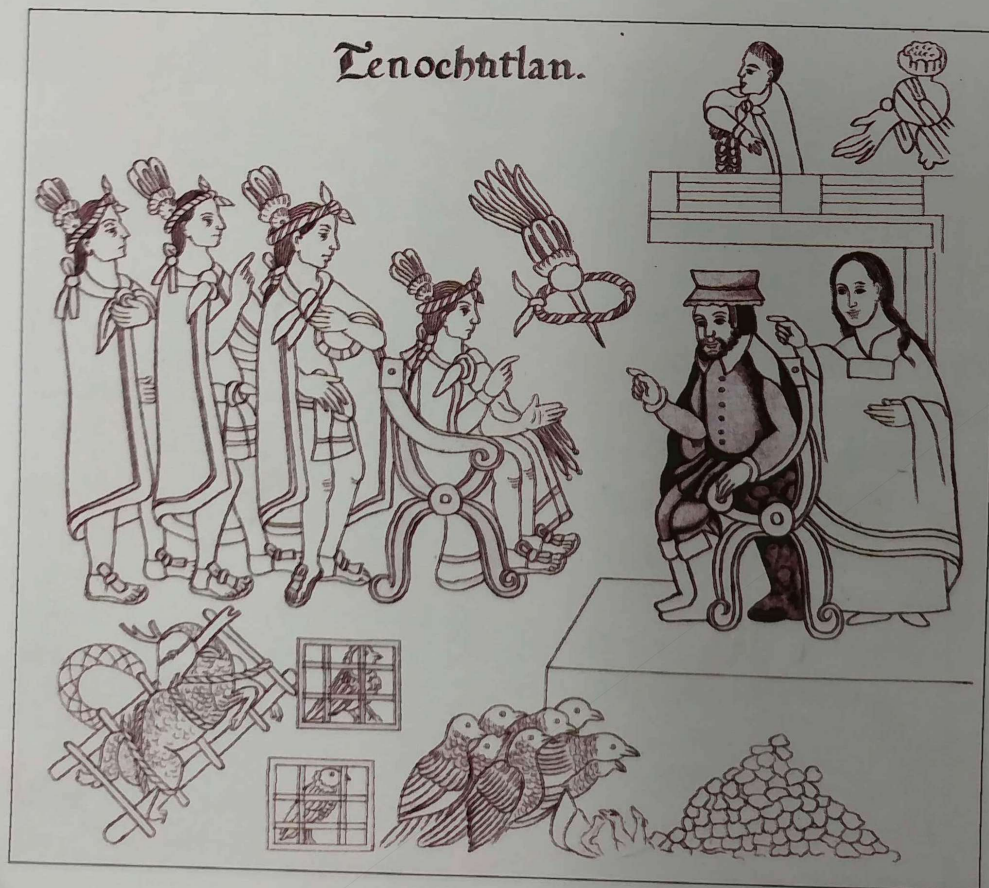
ened or killed by smallpox (a European disease) and began to starve to death. When Cortés and his army attacked, the Aztec warriors put up a strong defense; nevertheless, they were finally defeated in 1521.

The Spaniards now ruled all of Mexico. The mighty Aztec Empire lay in ruins. An Aztec poet wrote a sad poem about the mistreatment of his people:

*We are crushed to the ground; we lie in ruins.*

*There is nothing but grief and suffering in Mexico, where once we saw beauty and valor.*

### Tenochtitlan.







## 5.6 Jacques Cartier

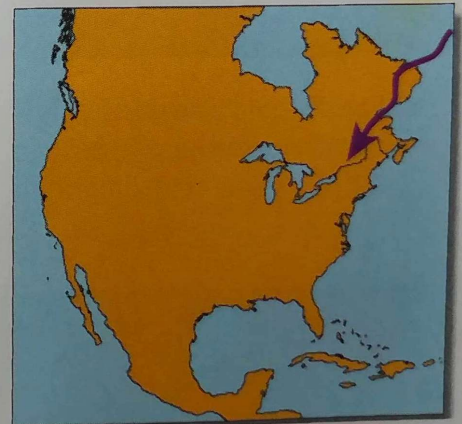
In 1521, Spain reached Asia by sailing around the southern tip of South America. Explorers had learned that the Americas lay between Europe and Asia. But people still thought that China was not far beyond the west coast of North America. King Francis I of France hoped to reach China's riches by sailing across North America. But no one had looked for such a water passage.

In 1534, the French king sent an experienced sailor and navigator, Jacques Cartier, to find this Northwest Passage. Cartier sailed west to Newfoundland, in present-day Canada. He entered a large gulf through a strait (a narrow waterway between two large land areas). He claimed the surrounding land for France. Then, he saw a waterway leading west. But his ship was low on food, so he had to return to France.

The next year, King Francis sent Cartier back to explore and map the waterway. Cartier reached its mouth on the feast day of Saint Lawrence. He named the river the *Saint (St.) Lawrence*. With Indian guides, he sailed almost 1,000 miles up river, until his boat could go no farther. He visited an Indian village, and brought its chief back to France. The chief told the king of great riches farther west.

In 1541, the king sent Cartier on a third voyage to set up a French empire in North America. He took more than 100 settlers. After enduring two harsh winters, Cartier and the settlers gave up. In 1542, they returned to France. Still, Cartier had staked France's claim in North America. Sixty years later, "New France" had its first permanent settlers.

Jacques Cartier sails up the St. Lawrence River in 1534.



The route Jacques Cartier followed up the Saint Lawrence River





Francisco Vázquez de Coronado and his men searched for one of the Seven Cities of Gold in Cibola.

## 5.7 Francisco Vázquez de Coronado

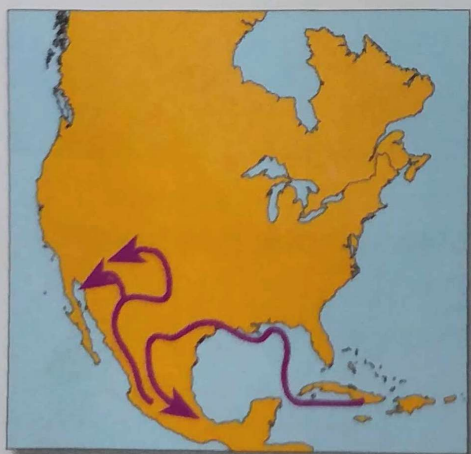
Spain's rulers gained wealth and power from their land claims in Mexico and South America. So, they wanted more land in North America. In 1540, hundreds of Spanish conquistadors marched north from Mexico under the command of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado.

Coronado had come to America to seek glory and fortune. Although he was a nobleman by birth, his brother had inherited most of the family wealth. Coronado paid for his expedition with money from his rich wife and the viceroy, or governor, of Mexico.

A priest had told Coronado that he had seen one of the Seven Cities of Gold in Cibola (modern-day New Mexico). The Spanish had heard that the Seven Cities were as rich as the Aztec empire in gold. Coronado marched to Cibola. He found Indian pueblos but no gold. Scouts looked further. They found the Grand Canyon and the Rio Grande valley, but no gold.

Still dreaming of gold, Coronado listened to an Indian slave. The slave told of a land where boats with golden eagles sailed past trees hung with golden bells. To find this land, Coronado marched across the plains to what is now Kansas. Again he found no gold. Angry, Coronado had the Indian strangled before heading home.

Coronado and his men returned in disgrace to New Spain in 1542. Representatives of the Spanish king later charged him with bad leadership of the expedition and treating the Indians cruelly. Only the Spanish missionaries considered Coronado's expedition successful. It gave them a chance to convert Indians in the southwestern part of North America to Christianity.



The route of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado through the American Southwest between 1540 and 1542



## 5.8 Henry Hudson

Holland and England kept searching for a northern sea route to Asia. In 1609, the Dutch East India Company in Holland hired Henry Hudson, an English sea captain. He set out to reach China by sailing across the top of Europe, near the Arctic Circle. His crew grew tired of ice and cold. They rebelled against their captain. Hudson agreed to change course and sail west across the Atlantic instead.

In July, Hudson and his men reached Maine and sailed south to Chesapeake Bay. Returning north, the ship entered a narrow harbor. Hudson saw a large body of water leading north. Believing this was the North-

west Passage, Hudson sailed up the waterway. When the water became too shallow for his boat, Hudson realized that it was only a river. (Today this is called the *Hudson River*.) But his voyage gave Holland a claim in North America. By 1624, the Dutch had settled in the Hudson Valley.

A year later, in 1610, English merchants paid for Hudson to cross the Atlantic again. Sailing farther north, Hudson reached Canada. He passed through a long, narrow strait into a large body of water. Hudson was sure that he had reached the Pacific Ocean. But, sailing down the coast, he found no opening. Then the waters froze, trapping the ship for the winter. In fact, Hudson had not reached the Pacific. The large body of water was a bay, now called *Hudson Bay*. He drew the first map of Hudson Bay.

In spring, the crew rebelled again. They set Hudson, his son, and seven others afloat in a small boat with no food. He was never seen again. But his voyage did give England a claim to eastern Canada.

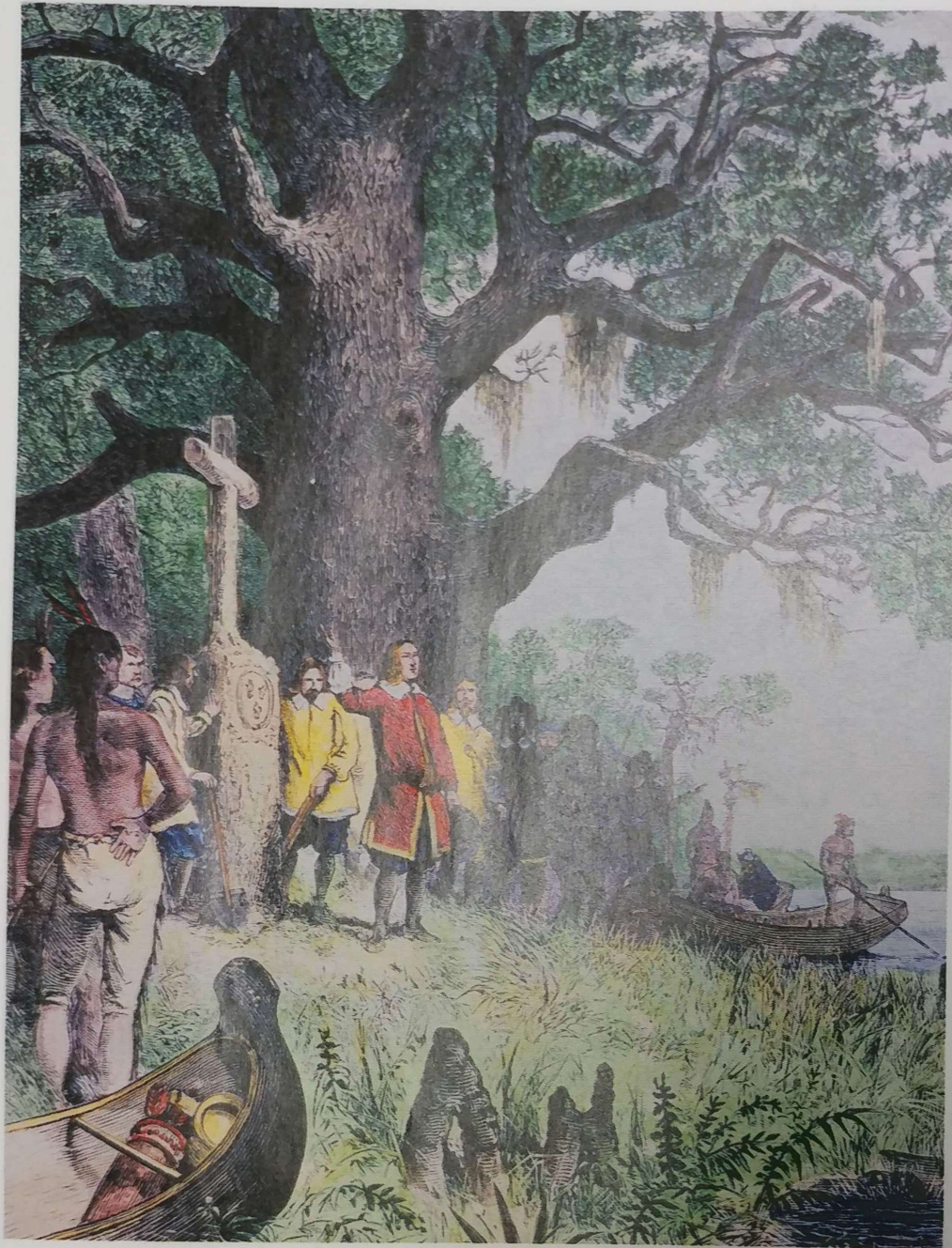


Henry Hudson's ship along the shores of the Hudson River during his first voyage in 1609.



Henry Hudson's first voyage to the New World





Robert de La Salle claimed the Mississippi River for France in 1682.



Robert de La Salle's route in the New World

## 5.9 Robert de La Salle

The French began to settle their territories also. In 1667, Robert de La Salle, a French nobleman, sailed to "New France." As a fur trader along the St. Lawrence River, La Salle learned Indian languages and explored the Ohio River. The Indians told him about a great river that flowed all the way south to the Gulf of Mexico.

La Salle dreamed not only of personal wealth but of a French empire of trading posts, forts, and settlements. In 1681, he set out in canoes to travel the Mississippi River. King Louis XIV of France liked the plan, but he wanted La Salle to pay for the journey himself. The governor of Montreal and a wealthy friend agreed to support him. When La Salle reached the mouth of the Mississippi River, he named the vast region Louisiana, for the French king.

La Salle then planned to establish a sea route from France to the Mississippi River. He went to France and received the king's permission. In 1684, he sailed to America with more than 200 settlers. After six months crossing the Atlantic, the ships missed the mouth of the Mississippi. They landed 400 miles to the west.

La Salle founded a colony there, on the coast of what is now Texas. Soon, everyone was starving. La Salle set out on foot for help. Convinced that La Salle was crazy, his own men murdered him. Most of these colonists died, but La Salle had given France claims to the entire Mississippi Valley.





## 5.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about eight early European explorers of the Americas. You used a matrix to keep track of information about these explorers.

Europeans wanted a shortcut to the riches of Asia. Christopher Columbus sailed west and reached land. His success inspired others. Early explorers like Columbus thought they had reached Asia. Eventually, explorers realized that this land was not Asia but the Americas. Some, such as Cartier and Hudson, kept searching for a shortcut to Asia. Instead, the real treasure that made European countries richer was the American territory they claimed.

Unfortunately, Native Americans suffered as a result of European exploration. The explorers killed native people who opposed them. They also infected them with contagious diseases.

In the next chapter, you will learn what happened when people from England decided to settle in America. What difficulties did the first settlers face? Read on to find out.

Spanish explorer Ponce de León was one of eight European explorers you read about in this chapter.