

# Hispanic Exploration in America

"I assure your Highnesses that these lands are the most fertile, temperate, level and beautiful countries in the world."

--Christopher Columbus.



Columbus taking possession of the new country  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91481671/>

## Historical Background

### The Age of Exploration

During the age of exploration, European countries explored new lands for political, religious and economic reasons. The explorations of the 15th and 16th centuries were fueled by a growing desire for expansion and trade, advances in shipbuilding and commerce, and the search for new markets and for the legendary sources of precious metals and other commodities.

Portugal took a leading role during most of the fifteenth century in searching for a route to Asia by sailing south around Africa, allowing the Portuguese to accumulate a wealth of knowledge about navigation and the geography of the Atlantic Ocean. Their explorations were colored by the European world view in the late 15th century based upon imaginings about the unknown and scientific observations of the known. Maps created during this time illustrate

a Medieval world view laid out into three continents, but also record real and imagined countries.

Spain's explorations were driven by the desire to expand its knowledge of the world, to discover spices and riches and to expand Christianity. In 1492, when Christopher Columbus, sailing for Spain, took a westerly course across the Atlantic Ocean searching for an alternative route to the Indies, he inadvertently "discovered" a new continent.

### The Naming of America

In 1507, Martin Waldseemüller, a German cartographer, created that map that first showed the area of Columbus's discovery. Waldseemüller named this new land "America" in honor of Amerigo Vespucci, who recognized that a "New World" had been reached through Columbus's voyage.

## Exploring, Conquering, and Claiming America

The items in this primary source set are materials that can be used to teach about the age of exploration, specifically, the contributions and interactions of Hispanic peoples in North America. They include:

### 1508

Juan Ponce de León accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the New World. He was appointed the first Governor of Puerto Rico and is also credited with the first known European excursion to Florida.

### 1519

Hernando Cortés was part of the generation of Spanish colonizers that began the first phase of the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Cortes formally claimed Mexican land for the Spanish crown in 1519.

### 1524

Francisco Pizarro conquered the Inca Empire and took part in explorations of the northern Caribbean coast of South America.

### 1531

The Huexotzinco Codex, an eight-sheet document was part of the testimony in a legal case against representatives of the colonial government in Mexico, ten years after the Spanish conquest in 1521.



Francisco Pizarro  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/90713624/>

### 1540

Francisco Vasquez de Coronado explored Arizona, New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado, the Grand Canyon and the Texas panhandle while searching for the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola in what is now Arizona. Coronado led Spaniards and Native Americans on an expedition of the southwestern part of the U.S.

### 1540

Grand Canyon, Colorado River, Ariz. The first European known to have viewed the Grand Canyon was García López de Cárdenas from Spain.

### 1541

Hernando de Soto, a Spanish explorer and conquistador, claims to have been the first European to see the great Mississippi River.

### 1565

St. Augustine was founded by the Spanish and is the oldest city in the present-day United States of America.

### 1602

Sebastián Vizcaíno, a Spanish soldier, entrepreneur, explorer, and diplomat was commissioned to explore and map the western coast. He designated many of the coastal landmarks that we know today, including San Diego.

**1602**

Inscription Rock, or El Morro (The Castle), as the Spaniards called it, is a striking landmark on the ancient trail between Acoma and Zuni. Spanish explorers and the administrators recorded their names and dates on smooth surfaces of the cliff, which reveal also numerous Indian petroglyphs.

**1606**

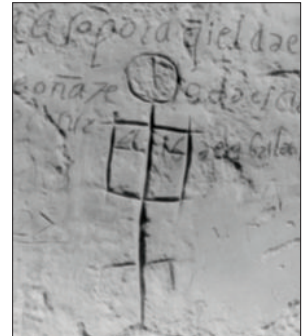
Juan de Onate’s mark on Inscription Rock. Onate passed the landmark on his return to the Rio Grande from “the south sea.”

**1610**

Santa Fe San Miguel Mission was founded as the capital of the Spanish colony of New Mexico.

**1710**

Tabula Mexicae et Floridae shows the extent of New Spain and Florida, New France, the American colonies, and the West Indies, rivers, towns, and trade routes.



Onate’s inscription  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/00649909/>

**1769**

Father Junípero Serra, famous for the founding of the California Franciscan Missions. Mapa, que comprende la Frontera, de los Dominios del Rey, en la America Septentrional was the result of the Marques de Rubí’s 1766-68 survey of the presidio system in New Spain. It was commissioned by Charles III. Mission San Diego de Alcalá, Mission Valley Road, San Diego, San Diego County, CA, one of Father Serra’s California Missions.

**1776**

This map by Antonia Vélez and Escalante shows missions, Indian towns, and prisons from Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico.

**1786**

Santa Barbara Music - Alabado: a song of Praise sung in Spanish.

**1807**

A map of the Internal Provinces of New Spain. 1807, created by Zebulon Pike.

## Suggestions for Teachers

These Library of Congress primary source materials support teaching about Hispanic exploration and settlement of America. They may be of special interest during Hispanic Heritage Month.

- Students can compare and contrast the various maps for chronology, level of detail, and changes over time.
- Students can evaluate the influence and contribution of Spanish explorers vs. English, French and Portuguese explorers. A class discussion of how history depicts each group could prove interesting.
- Students can compare and contrast New England, New France and New Spain.
- Students can research the biographies of the Hispanic explorers mentioned: Columbus, Ponce de Leon, Hernando Cortes, Francisco Pizarro, Hernando Coronado, Ferdinand DeSoto, Sebastian Vizcaino, Junipero Serra, Dominguez & Escalante. Challenge their critical thinking by asking them to examine or draw conclusions about the motives for each explorer.
- Students can create timelines (Spanish discoveries vs. English discoveries)
- Students can plan an expedition: whose route would they follow? Why? what supplies would they need? how long would their expedition take? what obstacles would they expect to encounter?
- Students can write a diary or personal narrative as a member of one of the expeditions.
- Students can re-enact an incident from the life of one of the explorers, in first person with dress, maps, and stories.
- Students can write a letter to the government encouraging funding for one of the expeditions.
- Students can consider how their life might be different if these explorers had not made their discoveries and propose an alternative history.
- Students can compare and examine the Winter Count and the Huexotzinco Codex. What do these methods of record keeping tell us about the people who created them? Students might enjoy creating a personal timeline or an accounting system using similar techniques.
- Students can map the Missions established in New Spain. How many of these still exist? What was the impact of these settlements on safety/forts, religion, government, and a trade/transportation network?



...Stained glass window with Junipero Serra...  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/LAMB2006000662/>

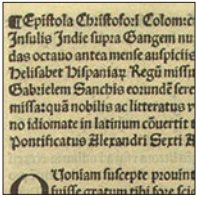
This primary source set also provides an opportunity to help students understand that different times shape different cultural values and mores. The set may also provide impetus for discussions that compare and contrast the assumptions and behaviors of a different time with what is politically and morally acceptable, today.

## Additional Resources



### 1492: An Ongoing Voyage

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/1492/>



### American Treasures: Columbus Reports on Discoveries of Island of India

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/tr00.html#obj35>



### Hispanic and Portuguese World – Encounters in America

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/guide/encameri.html>



### Historial Paralelas: Parallel Histories

<http://international.loc.gov/intldl/eshtml/eshome.html>

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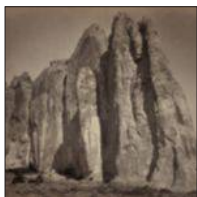
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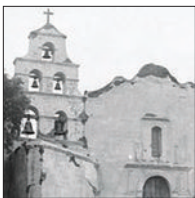
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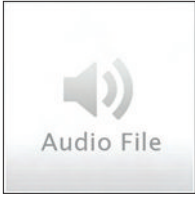
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