

Spanish Explorers Come to Texas

Why It Matters Now

Spanish explorers did not find the riches they sought in North America, but their search brought them to Texas.

TERMS & NAMES

conquistador, Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda, Hernán Cortés, **commission**, Pánfilo de Narváez, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Estevanico, **vicero**y, **friar**, **pueblo**, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, Hernando de Soto, Luis de Moscoso de Alvarado, **missionary**, **mission**, Corpus Christi de la Ysleta

OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the significance of the date 1519.
2. Describe the chronology of significant individuals and events in Texas history.
3. Identify important individuals and issues related to European exploration and colonization of Texas.

MAIN IDEA

Spanish explorers realized that the Americas could provide even greater riches than could be earned through trade with Asia. For the next 150 years after Columbus's voyages, adventurers explored the new lands in search of wealth.

A REAL-LIFE STORY

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca was a Spanish explorer who set out to discover new lands and new wealth. After surviving several disasters, Cabeza de Vaca and his weary crew landed on Texas shores, where they were approached by a group of Native Texans.

The Assessor and I went out and called to them, and they came to us. . . . We gave them beads and hawkbells, and each of them gave me an arrow, which is a pledge of friendship. They told us by signs that they would return in the morning and bring us something to eat, as at that time they had nothing.

At sunrise the next day, the time the Indians appointed, they came according to their promise, and brought us a large quantity of fish with certain roots, some a little larger than walnuts, other a trifle smaller. . . . They sent their women and children to look at us, who went back rich with the hawkbells and beads given them, and they came afterwards on other days, returning as before.

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *La relación*



Álvar Núñez
Cabeza de Vaca



- ▲ Cabeza de Vaca wrote about his life among Native Texans in a work called *La relación*, the first written work of Texas literature. ● **Why do you think this written record of life in early Texas is valuable to historians?**

Spain Establishes Colonies

From 1492 until 1519, Spain concentrated on establishing colonies in the area known as the Indies. Spaniards on expeditions along the coastline and shipwrecked explorers who had journeyed inland reported hearing about a great civilization in the interior of the continent. This civilization was reported to possess great riches. The Spanish explorers



wanted this wealth for themselves. These explorers became known as **conquistadors** (from the Spanish word meaning “conquerors”).

In 1519 the Spanish governor of Jamaica sent a fleet of ships under the leadership of Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda. His mission was to map the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico and establish a Spanish colony. With four ships and 270 men, Álvarez de Piñeda sailed from Jamaica to Cabo Rojo, Mexico. They were the first Europeans to observe the Texas coast. Álvarez de Piñeda’s journey was cut short, however, when he encountered fellow Spaniard Hernán Cortés, who was exploring farther south. Cortés saw him as a rival and arrested some of the exploring party. Álvarez de Piñeda retreated up the coast and established a settlement near the present-day Mexican city of Tampico.

Cortés Conquers Mexico

Six weeks before Álvarez de Piñeda’s voyage, the governor of Cuba had **commissioned** Hernán Cortés to explore the continent. The governor wanted a report on the rich and powerful civilization rumored to be there. After landing in Mexico with 11 ships, 508 soldiers, 16 horses, and weaponry, the 34-year-old Cortés founded the city of Veracruz.

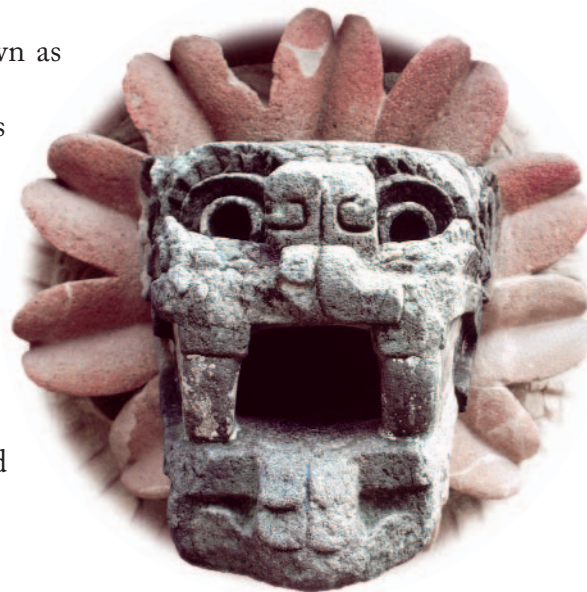
Cortés and his party clashed with the native peoples along the coast. News of the Spaniards soon reached Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital in the interior of Mexico. Having heard of Cortés’s fierce weapons and horses, Emperor Moctezuma believed that the explorer was the legendary god Quetzalcóatl. Cortés’s red hair was thought to be Quetzalcóatl’s hair of flames. The god’s return to the Aztecs had been eagerly anticipated. Moctezuma welcomed Cortés to Tenochtitlán, but the Spaniards were not looking for friendship. In a series of bloody battles, they attempted to seize the Aztecs’ gold and silver. Cortés’s men used their superior weapons to defeat the Aztecs. Cortés then renamed Tenochtitlán the city of México, the capital of New Spain.

The gold and silver Cortés brought back from Mexico made Spanish leaders even more eager to explore New Spain. If they could lay claim to these lands and the riches they held, Spain could become the leader of Europe and the world.

The Narváez Expedition

In 1526 Pánfilo de Narváez was granted the land of Florida by the king of Spain. He also received permission to conquer lands between Florida and Mexico and govern any Spanish colonies that he established.

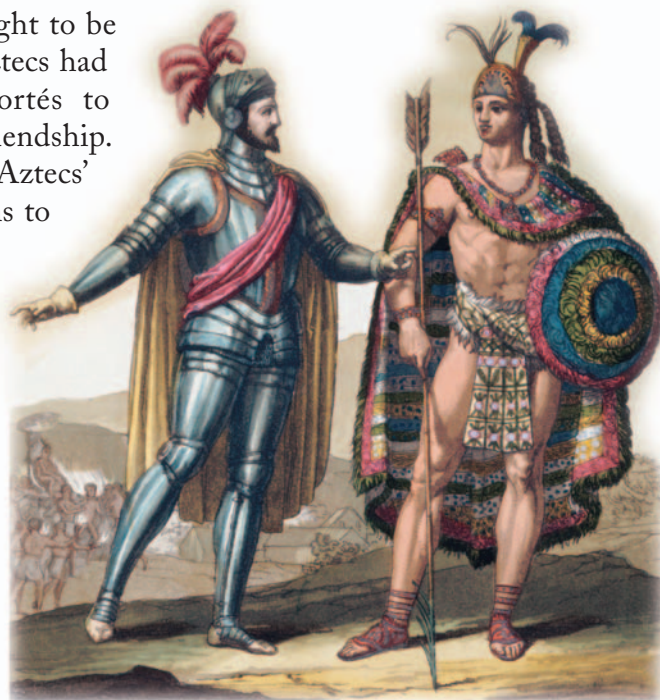
Narváez took his expedition of 400 men and 82 horses ashore on the Gulf side of Florida. The plan was to travel overland and meet his ships, which carried additional supplies, farther up the Gulf Coast. However,



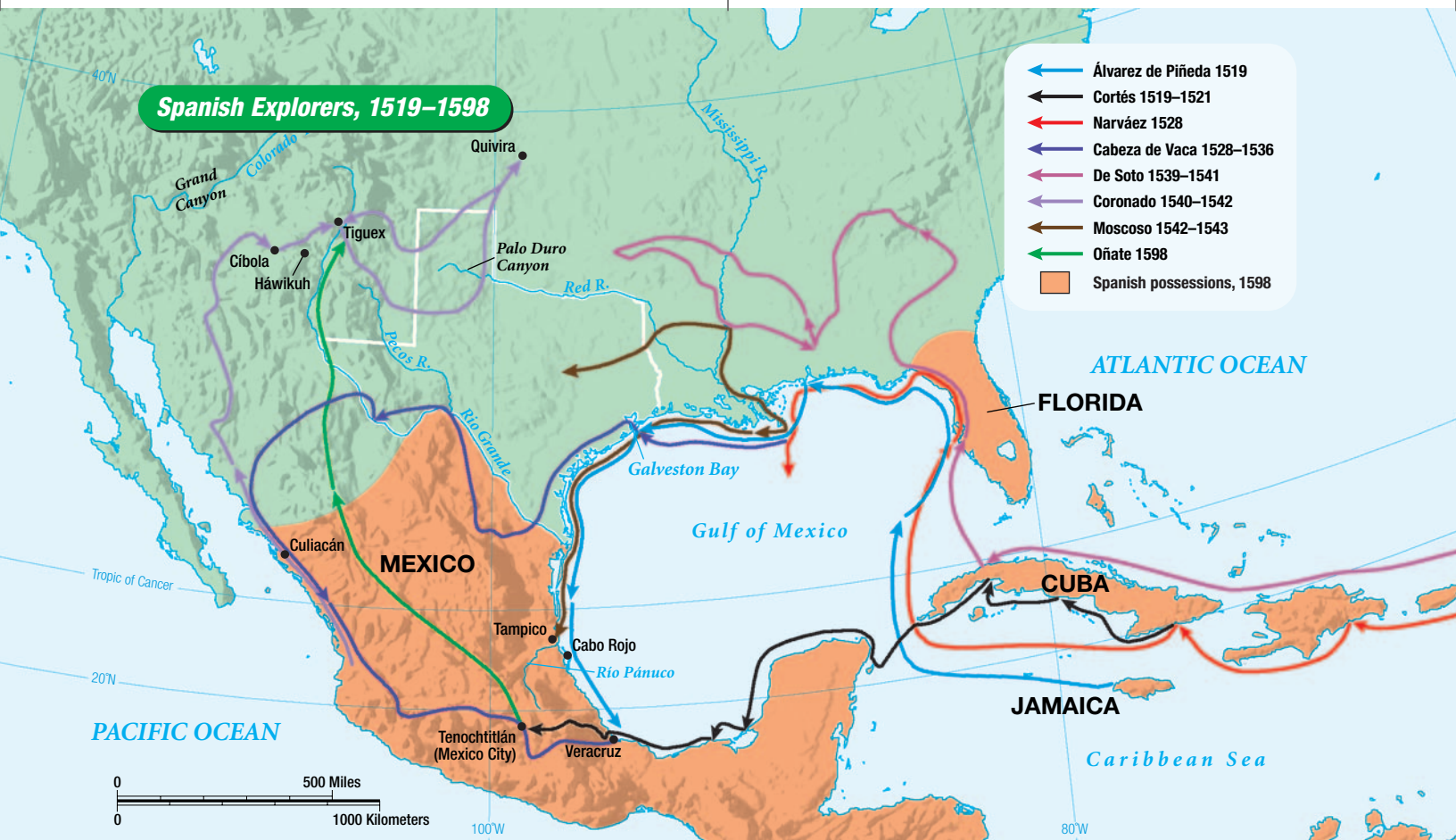
Stone carving of the Aztec god Quetzalcóatl

conquistador a Spanish explorer who searched for wealth and land in the Americas

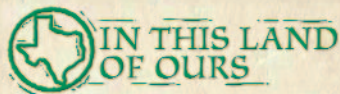
commission to grant the power or authority to carry out a specific task



▲ Moctezuma met with Cortés, believing the Spaniard might be the Aztec god Quetzalcóatl. ● **Why do you think Cortés agreed to meet with Emperor Moctezuma?**



▲ Spain was eager to find wealth in the Americas, and many explorers were eager to search for it. ● Describe the routes of Cortés and Cabeza de Vaca.



HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT RELATIONSHIPS

Many thousands of Native Texans died of European diseases. Medical records suggest that some may also have died of diseases unknown in Europe. Translations of doctors' notes from the 1500s indicate that symptoms included blood pouring from the nose and ears and a black tongue and heart. These symptoms were unknown to the Spaniards. Changes in diet, serious droughts, and harsh conditions may have set in motion a native virus, which could have been carried by rats. ● How might farming the land have contributed to the spread of disease?

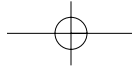
when Narváez reached the meeting place, his boats were not there. Starving and desperate, Narváez ordered his men, who now numbered fewer than 300, to build five rafts so that they could sail to Mexico. However, early in November 1528, a hurricane drowned many of the men at sea, including Narváez.

The 80 or so survivors beached their rafts at Galveston Bay. They were the first known Europeans to set foot in present-day Texas. The Karankawas who lived there felt sorry for the stranded Spaniards and gave them food and shelter. However, the Karankawas soon began dying of strange illnesses. Europeans carried diseases such as smallpox and influenza that the Karankawas had never been exposed to. The Native Americans lacked immunities to these diseases. Within months, most of the explorers had also died from the harsh conditions. Six years later, only four members of the Narváez expedition were alive.

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca

Among the four survivors was the second in command, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, and an African named Estevanico. Fearing that they wouldn't last much longer, Cabeza de Vaca persuaded Estevanico and the other survivors to escape with him to Mexico. For 18 months the group traveled across Texas into Mexico.

From the Karankawas, Cabeza de Vaca had learned how to use native herbs for healing. He had even learned to perform surgery. As they



traveled, his knowledge of healing helped the party remain on good terms with the native peoples they encountered. They became the first Europeans to explore the interior of Texas.

By 1536 Cabeza de Vaca, Estevanico, and the others had journeyed across southwestern Texas to Culiacán, a Spanish outpost. From there Cabeza de Vaca traveled to Mexico City and later to Spain. In both places, Cabeza de Vaca told officials about the native legends of seven cities of gold known as Cíbola. Spanish explorers had already found amazing riches in Mexico and Peru. Could Cíbola be a third such place?

The Search for the Seven Cities of Cíbola

Antonio de Mendoza, the **viceroys** of New Spain, sent **Friar** Marcos de Niza, Estevanico, and several others to confirm Cabeza de Vaca's story. After the men entered the Arizona–New Mexico area, Friar Marcos sent Estevanico ahead as a scout. Estevanico was to send a runner back with a cross to describe the size of the cities. A small cross would mean that the cities were small. A large cross would mean that he had found a fabulous city of gold. Several days later, the runner arrived carrying a large cross and reporting that they had made contact with people who had seen the cities.

Friar Marcos hurried north to join Estevanico only to learn that suspicious Zuni natives had killed him. Still, Friar Marcos marched on until he saw what he believed to be golden rooftops. What he likely saw was the sun reflecting on the adobe buildings of a Zuni **pueblo**, which to him looked like gold. Friar Marcos hurried to report his findings to the viceroy.

Francisco Vásquez de Coronado

On January 6, 1540, Mendoza commissioned Francisco Vásquez de Coronado to search for the Seven Cities of Cíbola. The expedition included 1,000 foot soldiers, 300 horsemen, several priests, 1,500 horses and mules, and large herds of cattle and sheep. Coronado traveled to the Zuni village of Háwikuh, the southernmost of the seven pueblos Friar Marcos had seen. Coronado did not find any golden rooftops, only adobe houses.

Not wanting to return without the riches promised, Coronado split up his expedition. One group traveled west across present-day New Mexico and became the first Europeans to see the Grand Canyon. Coronado led a group eastward to the native village of Tiguex, where he spent the winter of 1540–1541. There, he met a native whom the Spaniards called “El Turco,” or The Turk, an Eastern Plains native. He spoke of an amazingly wealthy land called Quivira (kee•VEE•rah). Coronado asked El Turco to lead him to Quivira.

On April 23, 1541, Coronado and his men began their search for Quivira. They crossed the Pecos River onto the West Texas Plains. They were amazed at the number of buffalo they saw. Having never seen this type of animal before, they mistook it for a type of cow.



Estevanico

Estevanico was born in Azamor, Africa. He was enslaved and brought on the Narváez expedition with his Spanish owner. His ability to learn languages quickly allowed him to work well with the Karankawas and other Native Texans. He also quickly memorized the locations of food and water sources and important trails.

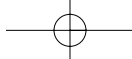
● **How would Estevanico's skills have helped the explorers in their search for wealth?**



viceroys *governor of a colony who rules in the name of the king*

friar *person belonging to one of the religious brotherhoods of the Roman Catholic Church*

pueblo *Native American village of houses built of adobe, or sun-dried bricks of straw and clay*



- Before he died, El Turco told Coronado that he had lied about Quivira because the Native Americans of Tiguex wanted the Spaniards off their lands. ● **Why do you think El Turco and his people wanted the Spaniards to leave?**



TEXAS VOICES

After nine days' march I reached some plains, so vast that I did not find their limit anywhere that I went, although I traveled over them for more than 300 leagues and I found such a quantity of cows in these, of the kind that I wrote Your Majesty about, which they have in this country, that it is impossible to number them, for while I was journeying through these plains, until I returned to where I first found them, there was not a day that I lost sight of them.

Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, Report to King Charles I

Eventually Coronado and his men reached Palo Duro Canyon, near present-day Amarillo. Coronado suspected that El Turco was not telling the truth, so he ordered all but 30 of his men back to Tiguex. Coronado traveled on to Quivira with only a small group of men. More than forty days later, he finally reached the city—a simple Native American village near present-day Wichita, Kansas. There they found no riches. Coronado had El Turco killed for lying. But before heading back to Tiguex, he claimed the land on behalf of the king of Spain. In the spring of 1542, Coronado left for Mexico City to report his bad news to the viceroy.

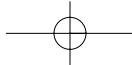


Conquistador horse armor

Hernando de Soto

In 1539, a second expedition left Spain in search of the Seven Cities of Cíbola. Led by Hernando de Soto, the expedition set sail for Florida. De Soto was unable to find Quivira, but natives he visited shared tales of gold and precious stones in villages nearby. In search of these riches, De Soto explored parts of present-day Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas. By 1541 the explorers had reached the Mississippi River.

Discouraged and running out of supplies, De Soto turned back in 1542. He became ill and died before he ever reached the coast. His successor, Luis de Moscoso de Alvarado, set out to find an overland route back to Mexico. He led his men westward into East Texas near present-day Texarkana. Unable to find riches or food, the expedition returned to the Mississippi



River. There they built boats to sail back to Mexico. In September 1543 only 311 of the original 600 members of the expedition reached their destination. The expedition was, however, the first major exploration into the interior of North America.

Spain Establishes Missions

After several groups explored North America, only to return empty-handed, Spain's interest declined. However, when English explorer Sir Francis Drake set sail for the Americas between 1578 and 1580, Spaniards saw him as a competitor. They decided to establish a Spanish colony in the northern frontier. Early in 1598, Juan de Oñate set out with 400 men, some of their families, a group of priests, and a herd of 7,000 horses, cattle, and sheep. The group settled in New Mexico and, in 1610, established the capital city of Santa Fe. From there, small parties were sent west and east searching for wealth. Those who went east crossed into the Texas Panhandle.

In 1629 and again in 1632, Father Juan de Salas led a small group of **missionaries** and soldiers from Santa Fe into Texas to work among the Jumanos in the area near present-day San Angelo. Then, in 1682, the Spaniards established the first Texas **mission**, Corpus Christi de la Ysleta, near present-day El Paso. The purpose of this mission was to spread Christianity to Native Americans in the area. The mission was a success, and more were promised.



- ▲ Shortly after Corpus Christi de la Ysleta was founded, 21 Spanish families were living in the mission.
- **Why was the success of this mission important?**

missionary *one who is sent to do religious or charitable work in a territory or foreign country*

mission *a settlement founded to spread Christianity to the people of the area*

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

Identify:

- conquistador
- Alonzo Álvarez de Piñeda
- Hernán Cortés
- commission
- Pánfilo de Narváez
- Estevanico
- viceroy
- friar
- pueblo
- Francisco Vásquez de Coronado
- Hernando de Soto
- missionary
- mission

Organizing Information

Use a chart like the one shown to list the effects of events that took place during the Spanish exploration of Texas.

CAUSE	EFFECT
Cortés brings gold and silver from Mexico to Spain.	
Later expeditions to North America fail to bring back gold.	
England sends Sir Francis Drake to explore the Americas.	

According to the chart, what was one of the reasons Spain sent explorers to the Americas?

Critical Thinking

1. Why is the date 1519 important to the study of Texas history? Explain.
2. Exploring and colonizing Texas was often dangerous work. List in chronological order the Spanish explorers from this section. Then describe one event or danger that each encountered. Explain how each event affected the explorer's work.
3. How do you think Juan de Oñate's Spanish colony

near Santa Fe differed from groups that had traveled through Texas? Explain how Oñate's colony helped lead to the Spanish colonization of Texas.

A Real-Life Story

Review *A Real-Life Story* on page 102. What evidence supports the conclusion that the Native Americans trusted Cabeza de Vaca and his men?

ACTIVITY

Geography

Why did the Spaniards choose to establish a mission in the El Paso area? Research and use what you already know about the Spaniards, Native Texans, and Texas geography to list possible reasons.



Go to www.celebratingtexas.com to research the Activity topic.