Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Spain and the 'New World', c1490–c1555

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Spain reaches the 'New World', c1490–c1512

- Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand funded Christopher Columbus, who wanted to reach Asia by sailing west. In 1492 he reached the Caribbean.
- The **Treaty of Tordesillas** (1494) divided newly found lands between Spain and Portugal. Spain settled Hispaniola, where native people were forced to work under the **encomienda** system.
- The **Casa de Contratación** (House of Trade) was set up in Seville in 1503 to control trade with the Americas.

Conquest of the Aztecs and Incas, c1513–c1529

- Hernán Cortés landed in Mexico in 1519. With the help of the Tlaxcalans, enemies of the Aztecs, his translator Malinche, and smallpox, he took the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan in 1521.
- Francisco Pizarro captured the Inca emperor Atahualpa at Cajamarca in 1532 and executed him in 1533, taking huge amounts of gold and silver.

Running the empire, c1529–c1555

- The **Council of the Indies** (1524) governed the empire for the king. Silver from mines such as Potosí (found 1545) made Spain rich.
- Bartolomé de las Casas, a friar, condemned the treatment of native people. The **New Laws** (1542) tried to limit the **encomienda** system, and the Valladolid debate (1550–51) argued over the rights of native peoples.

Key terms

Encomienda	A system giving Spanish settlers the labour of native people, in return for 'protecting' them.

Conquistador	A Spanish conqueror, such as Cortés or Pizarro.
Treaty of Tordesillas	The 1494 treaty dividing new lands between Spain and Portugal.
Casa de Contratación	The House of Trade in Seville, set up in 1503.
Council of the Indies	The council that governed Spain's American empire.
New Laws	Laws of 1542 that tried to protect native people.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who funded Columbus's voyage in 1492?
2. What did the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) do?
3. What was the encomienda system?
4. Who conquered the Aztec Empire?
5. Which people helped Cortés against the Aztecs?
6. Who captured the Inca emperor Atahualpa in 1532?
7. What made Spain rich from the 1540s?
8. Who condemned the treatment of native people?

Answers

1. Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain
2. Divided newly found lands between Spain and Portugal
3. Settlers were given the forced labour of native people
4. Hernán Cortés
5. The Tlaxcalans
6. Francisco Pizarro
7. Silver from mines such as Potosí
8. Bartolomé de las Casas

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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