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Origins and early maturity

Spaniards rushed into feverish founding activity only where there were sedentary Indians and mineral wealth; elsewhere their territories also languished in neglect, more indeed than the Brazilian northeast.

Our procedure in this book is to treat the main blocks of development separately; we hope the reader will be prepared to look beneath the superficial emphasis on nationality which this entails. First, we discuss in three chapters the beginnings and early maturity of Latin American society in the central areas, which all happen to have been under Spanish rule. Next, in the following two chapters we do the same for eastern seaboard tropical export society, which for reasons of precedent, geography, and market happens to have been all Portuguese—or was until the north European powers became involved in it in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Finally we devote a chapter to areas which were frankly marginal from the point of view of Europeans in America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and here, at least, the reader will see directly illustrated our contention that local conditions shape things more than European national propensities, for the fringes include areas under both Spain and Portugal, and indeed, the Brazilian south and interior make one unit together with much of Spanish America Paraguay and Argentina in contrast to either Mexico-Peru or the Brazilian northeast.

A further complicating factor is that, though the Spaniards went quite quickly and by direct routes to the central areas, their first impact was in the Caribbean. Because the island inhabitants shared only part of the characteristics of the fully sedentary peoples, structures and practices there were discernibly different from the often more elaborate or stable ones which evolved on the mainland. Nevertheless, the Caribbean experience left such an imprint on all that followed that treatment of it is an indispensable introduction to discussion of the European occupation of the central areas.

From islands to mainland: the Caribbean phase and subsequent conquests

In a society which has existed in unbroken continuity in the same area for some centuries, there will be strong regional distinctions and competing traditions of thought, and change is usually piecemeal and cumulative. When people are removed in large numbers to a new environment, however, things happen somewhat differently for a time. Although the newcomers will attempt to preserve as many of their patterns of thought and behavior as possible, circumstances force them to make wide-ranging adjustments in the first years of their presence in the new area, merely in order to survive and achieve their proximate goals. A set of practices and a new vocabulary crystallize very quickly, thereafter changing little for relatively long periods of time. If the new society expands quickly over a large area, as with Spanish America, there will be great uniformity in certain things such as local governmental forms, commercial arrangements, and even spoken language, despite regional variation in the new local base.

The reasons why new areas experience quick cultural-institutional crystallization followed by slow change are many and complex, though if one takes the view that human societies innovate as little as possible at any given time, the rest tends to follow. More relevant here are some of the specific mechanisms. Many new societies have revered and rewarded firstcomers. In the Spanish Indies this tendency was to take the form of a strong emphasis on antiguedad, or seniority. The wealthiest and most respected settlers were those who had been there longest, and newcomers readily heeded the advice of old hands on how things were to be done. Senior settlers were always the ones to lead ventures into yet newer areas, and once there, they, as governors and council members, arranged things in the way already familiar to them. Of course change continued, in every branch and on every level of life; over long stretches of
time, new regional dialects and subcultures would arise. Any new area eventually becomes an old one. Meanwhile, for a matter of decades or centuries, the Caribbean tradition would be a large element in the workings of Spanish American society.

The Caribbean phase becomes even more complex because the Spaniards were not a previously immobile people occupying their first new area. Rather, they were inclined to view the Caribbean in the light of their own already established tradition of expansion, mainly "reconquest." At the same time, the initial discovery and attempts at exploitation were carried out under the direction of Genoese Columbus and his relatives and cohorts, entirely within the framework of previous Genoese-Portuguese activity in the Mediterranean and above all in Africa.

Not only Columbus and his friends but many of the Andalusian maritime people who manned his ventures, as well as the Spanish crown itself, were prepared to emulate Portuguese overseas experience to treat America on the analogy of Africa or perhaps India. However, America was neither Africa nor India. And just as importantly, the Spanish immigrants to America insisted on operating within their own heritage. A maritime tradition of trade and exploration thus competed with, and in the end largely gave way to, the old Iberian tradition of full conquest, substantial immigration, and permanent rule—though some aspects of the Portuguese-Genoese tradition entered definitively into Spanish American life. The following pages, then, will deal with the Caribbean phase in the double light of transition and precedent.

The course of Caribbean events

First let us take a narrative glimpse at the general course of events in the Caribbean in order to have a context for a more topical analysis. No sooner had Columbus, in the name of the Castilian crown, "come upon some islands in the Atlantic," as the resentful Portuguese have tended to phrase it, than the Spaniards and the maritime organizers began to pull in different directions. The basic notion of Columbus, in line with his Genoese and Portuguese background, was to establish forts and factories manned by salaried employees, to trade with the local population for any products of value in Europe, and to continue exploration, in search of stronger and richer trading partners. The instinct of the Spaniards, on the other hand, was to concentrate first on settlement and thorough rule of the well-populated area which had already been found. As a result, 1495 saw

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the departure from Spain of the largest and most complete expedition yet to leave Europe, equipped with everything needed to transplant European life: people of many trades and estates, seeds, plants, and animals.

For some years the newcomers concentrated entirely on Hispaniola (today the Dominican Republic and Haiti), which apparently had the largest indigenous population of any of the islands. After a short time of trial and error, Santo Domingo, on the southeastern coast, emerged as the Spanish capital and principal seat, a role it was long to retain for the whole Caribbean. The Arawaks of Hispaniola generally offered little resistance to the mere presence of the intruders, so that the latter became established without what one could call a real conquest, and resistance took more the form of sporadic rebellion as the indigenous people came to realize the extent and permanence of the change. Columbus and others familiar with the Portuguese experience in Africa investigated the local possibilities for all the economic enterprises successful there: tropical woods, spices, slave export, sugar, and gold. Of these only gold proved immediately and decidedly viable, and even so there was one major difference between African and American gold exploitation, for whereas in Africa an outsider could acquire through trade gold which was already mined, in the Caribbean islands he must direct production himself if it was to be on a sufficient scale. This meant a thorough occupation, a systematic rechanneling of indigenous labor, and, with the success of the operation, continued strong European immigration and the consequent rise of a complex immigrant society.

This large development began to take place under the direction of a non-Spaniard who would have been much better placed on the African or East Asian coasts than as perpetual viceroy and admiral of Hispaniola and all the other new lands. Columbus turned out, of course, to be a "poor governor." Earlier we saw how the Spaniards despaired sailors and foreigners; now someone who was both was supposed to rule them and command their respect. And Columbus, rather than turning full attention to Hispaniola, continued his preoccupation with Mediterranean-Genoese concerns, from further exploration to the redemption of Jerusalem from the Muslims. Soon the Spanish personnel of Hispaniola were rebelling, imposing Iberian forms on their own initiative. There was nothing for the Spanish crown to do but to appoint Spanish governors, from 1499 onward, to regularize and legitimate the process.

At home in Spain, international commercial organizations based in Seville began to transfer some of their business to the Caribbean,
and as word spread through the south of Spain, the social and regional sources of emigration continued to widen. As to the crown, soon after the first reports on the islands it negotiated the treaty of Yordesillas (1494), intended by the two parties to let Portugal exploit Africa and Asia while Spain took the Western Hemisphere. It was not then known how far South America jutted to the east, so that the line drawn gave Portugal treaty rights to much of Brazil, an area which they discovered independently not many years after. (This is not to ascribe great importance to the treaty. The decisive factors were rather that Spain had its hands full with the major American centers, Brazil appeared of little worth at first, and it lay very near the Portuguese sea route to India.) In governmental affairs, a process similar to that in the islands was going on, that is, an initial inclination to accept a Mediterranean model was giving way to classic Iberian forms. In 1503 the crown formally created the Casa de Contratación (House of Trade) in Seville. Apparently it was modeled ultimately on a Genoese original and was intended to perform the actual exploitation of the American colonies in the crown’s name; instead, it soon became a check-point, registry, and customs collecting agency for incoming and outgoing fleets. Crown governmental functions were increasingly exercised through councils of the royal court, who by 1524 had become the Council of the Indies, organized like other royal councils. On Hispaniola, cycles of gold mining and demography were crucial to the timing of events. Significant placer deposits—quickly located, produced enough wealth to sustain the overall Spanish venture, but they were becoming exhausted by around 1515. Through the encomienda, the Spaniards acquired sufficient labor to work the mines for a time, but so precipitous was the decline of the Indian population that exhaustion of the labor supply antedated that of the deposits. Slaving expeditions into surrounding areas were one Spanish response. There followed the full-scale occupation, in 1508–11, of Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Cuba, where similar, though quicker, cycles immediately got under way, as well as the first venture in force to the mainland, to Tierra Firme (the area of Panama and the western Caribbean coast of Colombia), in 1509–13. By the time of the conquest of Mexico, 1519–21, the original demographic and mineral basis for a strong European presence had practically disappeared from the large Caribbean islands.

For some years yet Santo Domingo retained the aura of being the capital of the Indies. A brief boom of pearl extraction off the Venezuelan coast helped, and export of sugar and hides gave the islands a new economic base, though an extremely limited one, while the importation of African slaves began the long slow process of re-creating a demographic base. But for many decades the Caribbean was to be a backwater, important mainly for the supply and safety of fleets going back and forth between Spain and the Spanish American central areas.

Spanish city and society on Hispaniola

A closer examination of the content of Spanish society in the Indies of the conquest period must await our discussion of the central areas, about which a great deal more is known than about this area whose primary records have suffered so from buccaneers and wet tropical conditions. For the moment, let us presume only that a surprisingly broad cross section of Spanish types was present and active in the same style as in Spain itself, as far as conditions permitted. In terms of regional origin, they were overwhelmingly from the south of Spain (exclusive of the just conquered Moorish kingdom of Granada), that is, they were from the areas closest to Seville, from where ships departed and news disseminated. Much doubt remains as to whether or not the southerners were able to put a permanent imprint on the Spanish culture of the Indies in the brief time before masses of immigrants from the rest of Castile joined them. In any case, Andalusians dominated the first phase and large numbers of Extremaduras joined them starting with the arrival of Cáceres-born Governor fray Nicolás de Ovando in 1502. By the time of the occupation of the mainland, one can speak of a spread of immigrants from all areas of Castile.

The facts do suffice for us to discuss some general aspects of the Spanish city as it evolved in the Caribbean. If society in Spain was urban centered, Spanish society in the Indies was to be even more so. Before many years had gone by, so much of the Spanish population was in the city of Santo Domingo, soon a well-built urban complex with many stone buildings, that the name given to the island tended to be ignored in favor of calling the entire region after the city—a custom retained to this day in the “Dominican Republic.” Congregating in urban centers in a new area, where the immigrants would otherwise be too scattered for joint social-economic or even military action, seems so natural a development that one might wonder why things are ever done any other way. At any rate, the consequence was that there could be stability, growth, and even a flourishing of the refinements of European culture at the central
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Urban nucleus while the broader hinterland from which the city drew saw little Europeanization or underwent marked decay. While gold was running out and a more modest economic base was being found, while the bulk of the indigenous population was disappearing from disease and other ravages, Santo Domingo not only remained a strong Spanish center but received in 1508 a Castilian high-society contingent in the retinue of Columbus's son, now nominal governor, followed by the first high court, or Audiencia, in the Indies in 1511; the great gothic cathedral was built after the fall of the original system, around 1527-40, and a university was created, formally at least, in 1538. The stability of the major foundations did not necessarily extend, however, to any smaller more specialized ones in the hinterland, especially towns or camps set up for something as ephemeral as gold mining. Some fifteen such settlements existed on Hispaniola during the boom years, only to fade away when their reason for existence was gone.

The overall functioning of the Spanish city in the Indies was the same as in Spain itself, from the role of the municipal council, or cabildo, composed of the locally powerful to the descending hierarchies which reached out of the city into the countryside to rule it and draw from it the city's sustenance. In the Indies there was, however, initially a new element of stark differentiation between the two spheres: The city was Spanish, the countryside was Indian, and any Spaniard in the country was there fleetingly on the city's behalf.

In one other respect the Spanish cities of the Caribbean, and after them those of all the Indies, stood apart from the Iberian originals. Urban structure, both physical and social, is one of the most marked examples of the quick establishment of a uniform procedure which Spaniards in America would follow wherever they went. And a very important one it is, for the city was the general framework of Spanish life. The first act settlers would carry out in a given area, during or even before its conquest, was to set up a Spanish city and council. Despite the fact that mining towns and ports would rarely conform to the norm and that Santo Domingo itself was not perfectly standard, the Spaniards, well before the end of the primary Caribbean phase, had hit upon a definitive plan for their cities (see Figure 2).

The layout was simplicity itself: a large square in the center, a gridwork of wide, perfectly straight streets extending from there in all directions, forming square or rectangular blocks, four lots to a block, of which only a certain number in the proximity of the square were at first actually surveyed, assigned, and built on. On one side of the square would be the principal church, on another the municipal council building, on another the residence of the governor or governor's representative; remaining properties facing the square, as well as those nearby, held the residences of the most important local citizens (usually the encomenderos), which would be as imposing as possible, so that the center would soon be built up wall to wall. The wealthy citizens, however, rented out shops facing the street or square to merchants, artisans, notaries, and the like. If the city flourished, an arcaded gallery would shortly ring the square. Humble Spanish settlers had their homes in an outer ring of lots, and beyond these, whole blocks were given over to gardens. This orderly complex constituted the traza, or "layout." After that the streets were
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undefined; temporary huts, or ranches, mainly for Indians serving the Spaniards, dominated the scene. The Spanish American city could thus grow indefinitely through expansion of the traza while maintaining a near-total stability at the center. The overall structure would not vary or need to vary over many centuries: always nucleated, always with a better-developed center and a more provisional edge.

Just why this pattern should have arisen has been the topic of much discussion; some commentators have appealed to Renaissance ideals, others to the plan of camps used as bases for combating the Moors of Granada. Cities in Spain proper were generally more irregular and less nucleated than in the Indies, with, for example, the cathedral on one plaza, the council on another, and various pockets of choice residential sites. But all the tendencies of the Spanish American city can be seen in its antecedent in Spain, and one may say that the former is all in all the way the latter might be if it had been created all at once on a new site instead of growing over centuries and millennia. Indeed, the gridiron plan, the central square, and the concentration of wealth and functions around it would almost seem to impose themselves in a new foundation. Yet the English were to proceed quite differently in America, as were, in part, the Spaniards’ fellow Iberians, the Portuguese.

Mechanisms of Spanish–Indian interaction

The encomienda

After the first few years, for the conquest period as a whole, the primary tie between the Spaniards and the indigenous people of America was an institution which has come to be called the encomienda. Its history is most complex, since it was both governmental and private, affecting all sectors of the population, spread in varying forms to greatly varying regions, and changed quickly over time. One can say of most forms that they represented a Spanish attempt to acquire Indian services or goods through the use of traditional local indigenous authority and on the basis of already existing socio-political units. The full-blown, classic form of the encomienda was never attained in the Caribbean, so we will need to return to the topic again, but the essential structure came into being and traditions were established which the mainland encomienda would continue unbroken.

In the first years, before the foundation of Santo Domingo, the
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Figure 3. Schema of an encomienda on the Caribbean islands.

holdings of Spaniards and also for any agricultural enterprise undertaken there—though over time the connotation was increasingly that of the European livestock which were the item most in demand. Some estancias were on the edges of the Spanish cities, the only market other than the mines, but the pattern that most interests us here is that an encomendero would often have an estancia granted to him in the immediate vicinity of his Indians, so as to have the labor supply close at hand. Certain early directives, trying to alleviate the problems arising when a new encomendero would be appointed and would arrive to find the old encomendero still owning an estancia in his area, give the impression that this informal conjoining of estancia and encomienda was an almost universal practice.

Though the encomienda was built upon the traditional powers of the cacique, the system we have sketched put new demands on the Arawaks as to type and amount of work. There was need for direct Spanish intervention, for supervisors and auxiliaries. Of the supervisors the most frequently mentioned is the estanciero, who was named after the estancia which was his main responsibility, but who served the encomendero also as labor boss or even miner. He would be poorer, more recently arrived, or humbler than the man he worked for. Some encomenderos could afford black slave aides, but the most numerous auxiliaries were Indians themselves, outside the encomienda system proper.

Naborias

The reader will remember from our discussion of preconquest Arawa society that "naboria" was the name for a permanent dependent of a noble or chieftain, not subject to general community duties and privileges. Through commandeering, voluntary adhesion, and actual assignment by the authorities, Spaniards quickly began to acquire naborias as their own personal servants. Both encomenderos and nonencomenderos did this, soon using their aides in any number of tasks requiring stability and new skills not to be expected of shifting encomienda laborers. Though the naborias bore no formal relationship to the encomienda, the system at its height could hardly have functioned without them. It is not to be imagined that all or even most of the Spaniards' naborias had that status from birth; rather, many seem to have been encomienda Indians subtracted from their villages. The important thing is that because of the existence of this role in preconquest society, both Indians and Spaniards had well-defined expectations concerning it. Before the culmination of the demographic disaster, the naborias new and old were on their way to becoming a group apart, in cities and in association with Spanish enterprises. On the mainland this movement was to be resumed under more stable conditions. In 1514, when the Indian population had declined to a small fraction of its former size, of the remaining some 22,000 able-bodied adults, nearly half as many were naborias as encomienda Indians. Earlier the proportion of encomienda Indians would have been higher, for the naborias had been replenished from the outside, but this can serve to indicate that they were a major group, important to conquest society and even more important for the Spanish American future.

Indian slavery

Encomienda Indians were not slaves. A slave is bought and sold individually for a price; in the Latin American context he was always removed from his geographical and ethnic origins and lived in close
and permanent association with Europeans. None of these things are true of the encomienda Indians, who stayed on the same lands as always and retained their group organization, even when they went in parties to work for the encomendero. In world history generally, it has been neither advantageous nor feasible for a conquering group to enslave a dense population on its home ground. Enslavement was rarely to be practiced with fully sedentary peoples of America and only under certain conditions with those who were semi-sedentary, so that Indian slavery was to be a marginal phenomenon, primarily used in connection with the mobile peoples of the fringe.

Until this distinction established itself firmly, however, enslavement of Indians occurred as a measure of transition and emergency even with some sedentary groups. In the Iberian heritage, nonbelievers taken in just battle could be enslaved, and there were set procedures of official branding, registry, and payment to the crown of duties on the new slaves. Indians who in any way resisted Spanish entry into their lands were thus liable to enslavement; as population and labor supply decreased on Hispaniola, Spaniards sailed to neighboring islands on what were little more than slaving expeditions, with no regard as to whether or not the people were agricultural villagers. Before long, however, full-scale Spanish occupation extended to all the areas of dense settlement, and slaving came to apply more to small isolated groups like those in the Bahamas or to truly hostile and mobile groups, among whom the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles were outstanding. The difference between Arawak and Carib was soon fully apparent to the Spaniards, who placed no settlements on the Caribs’ islands and after some experience decided there was no necessity to prove their hostility in each individual case; the mere fact of a person’s being a Carib was sufficient basis for legal enslavement. As the Spaniards pushed their raids and explorations past the Lesser Antilles and along the Venezuelan coast toward the west, they continued to identify the people with the Caribs and to proceed accordingly. The captors sold the new slaves to Spaniards on the large islands, to be used in gold mines or to supplement the nabobias; but before many years the Indian slaves died out almost as completely as the original inhabitants.

Congregation

Let us at this point merely mention that in response to both declining population and Indian residence patterns, which were more dis-

Precious metals and their role in the economy

The gold of West Africa led the Iberians to expect more of the same in the Western Hemisphere, which seemed at first a comparable area. At the same time, Iberian reconquest was associated with the idea of spoils, precious metals and jewels. Even more important than precedent, though, was the basic structure of the social and economic situation which presented itself to the Spaniards in America. Whether they were impelled by ambition or economic pressure, the immigrants’ aim was to live at a standard at least as high as the European, and, since they were as ethnocentric as other peoples, they meant to live in the European fashion. Consequently, they would have to be able to import European cloth and other manufactures, as well as some staples not easy to duplicate, such as wine and olive oil. To pay for such imports, they would have to have an export with high specific value and strong, steady demand in Europe. At the time there was only one such commodity, precious metals, and of these the Caribbean offered only gold. Freight was intolerably expensive for anything bulky, ships being small, distances great, and so much of the ship’s capacity needed for provisions alone. America had no Chinese silks or East Indian spices. The only at all realistic alternative was sugar production, but the Portuguese Atlantic islands were already filling the then relatively inelastic European demand, the Portuguese had the market connections, and sugar was in any case a highly capitalized and technical business, whereas the Spaniards at this point needed not only something nontechnical but something which would provide capital rather than require it.

So gold it was. Following up on the Arawaks’ beginning, the Spaniards looked for and found gold on the islands, not truly major
deposits but placer mines which produced very significant wealth for a time. It took little equipment and only moderate expertise to dig out sand and gravel and then pan it, and the settlers soon mastered the technique. Untouched mountain streams almost anywhere will yield at least a little of this kind of gold. After the Caribbean experience, the Spaniards would seek out and exploit placer mines wherever they went, so that each new area in turn would go through an ephemeral gold-rush phase, helping to pay the expenses of the early stages.

While it lasted, Caribbean gold mining set precedents that would carry over to other areas and even to the much more long-lasting and large-scale silver mining of the mainland. In Spanish law, underground wealth was in the public domain. One consequence was that mines did not merely go to their discoverers, or to any class of miners proper, but were distributed by local political authorities to those who were already powers in the community. Another consequence was that the mines and the gold in some sense could be said to belong to the crown, which through its officials at first tried to take half the product or more, then settled on a nominal fifth, or quinto, long to be the most important source of royal revenue.

**Elements of the international maritime tradition**

Iberian commerce in the Caribbean arose as a branch of the international commerce of Seville. The reader will remember that the Genoese were the financial-commercial leaders in Seville at the end of the fifteenth century. Hence (and certainly not hindered by the role of their compatriot Columbus), they dominated the first phase of commerce between Spain and the Indies. Through loans, they supplied the capital for expeditions, individual emigrants and shipmasters, and mercantile ventures, and they themselves were very much involved in trade to the Caribbean. Since they already controlled the business of exporting Andalusian agricultural produce, they easily entered the field of provisioning the Indies, sending out junior partners and factors to sell the shipments. But before 1540 the Spaniards of the Indies were becoming self-sufficient in European foods, except for wine and olive oil. The Genoese, in any case already concentrating on European high finance, tended to drop out of the trade.

The forms and mechanisms of commerce remained the same as previously explained for Seville, but personnel shifted quickly. The successors to the Genoese in the Caribbean trade, which soon be-

came primarily an exchange of Spanish cloth and manufactures for gold, were the north Castilian merchants who had been Seville's second commercial power; on their heels came the Andalusians proper.

Caribbean carry-overs from the Portuguese African experience were many, at times with the Genoese as the connecting link. Columbus and others immediately imagined that it might be possible, based on the African analogy, to export Indian slaves to Europe. But mortality was disastrous among Indians when exposed to only a few Europeans; the effects were even quicker and more universal when a few Indians were immersed in a European world. As soon as this was known, Indian slaves became unsalable in Spain, precluding a transatlantic Indian slave trade. Instead, there was soon interest in bringing African slaves to the Caribbean, as auxiliaries and then over time simply to help repopulate the islands. For a time the Genoese were the intermediaries, but for the long run it is more important that the Portuguese were in control of the trade at the source and later were to use this avenue to enter the mainstream of the Spanish American import–export business.

At the end of the gold phase, around 1515, the Spaniards began to build sugar mills patterned after those on the islands off Africa, importing technicians from the Canaries as well as African slaves for the most intensive labor. In the 1540s a score of mills were in operation on Hispaniola (three of the largest run by Genoese) and production was substantial. Earlier we mentioned some reasons for the failure of the Caribbean industry to expand further at this time. That it was viable at all was largely owing to a hidden subsidy from the precious metals of the mainland; the latter paid for the arrival of goods and people on numerous ships which would have had to return to Seville in ballast if it were not for the sugar being grown and hidden taken from the European livestock which nearly overran the islands after their depopulation.

The Spaniards in America abandoned the Portuguese African tradition of trading with indigenous peoples as a principal technique in favor of direct occupation, primarily because that was what the situation demanded. But still there were many echoes of the Portuguese resgate. The Spanish cognate resgate appears in many connections, with the same connotations of a trade with an indigenous non-European people, mixing barter and force or the threat of it. Slave raiding was resgate; the Spaniards were willing either to trade or to fight and were as interested in gold or pearls as in slaves. The term was also used for unofficial individual trading with any indi-
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and it continued in this sense on the mainland. Above all, though, rescate was the mode of dealing with the mobile peoples. Thus before the end of the Caribbean phase the principal modes of Spanish interaction with the peoples on the fringes had been established: enslavement, barter, and intermittent raiding without full conquest.

In general, then, the Spaniards adopted many Genoese-Portuguese techniques, though as auxiliaries rather than as central, except in the case of international commerce, and the Genoese themselves faded out of the American picture, until by 1550 the only remainder of them was their presence among the humble mariners of the Indies.

The Spanish Caribbean heritage expressed in vocabulary

For most purposes the Caribbean island phase of the Spanish occupation of the Indies was over in less than twenty-five years after 1542, during which the Indians of the large islands had practically died out and the numbers of Spaniards involved had never been great. (In the wet tropics of America, Europeans as individuals did not fare markedly better than the Indians; the majority of any large incoming group would succumb within a couple of years—the difference was that there was an outside source for further immigration and that a European who lived past the acclimatization period had a normal life expectancy.) No more than a few thousand Spaniards had as yet come to America, and those active at any one time could often be measured in hundreds. Yet well before 1510 the major techniques and structures having to do with city life, the economic base, commerce, and mode of relationship to sedentary and non-sedentary Indians had been developed. The Spaniards would not treat the mainland as a fully new area but would operate as they had on the islands.

Perhaps the reader can get some notion of the extent and nature of the Caribbean heritage by glancing at a list of terms, not used in Spain, which became general in the Spanish of the Indies after first being adopted in the Caribbean (see Table 3). Some of the terms denote types of people, practices, artifacts, or plants characteristic of Indian cultures; others refer to Spanish practices specific to the Indies. All these words would be heard on the mainland during the conquests and for generations afterward, when the Caribbean was a backwater occasionally brought to life by the passage of the silver fleets.

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Table 3: Spanish American words from the Caribbean

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish word</th>
<th>English translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salina</td>
<td>Salt flat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danza</td>
<td>Danse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estancia</td>
<td>Stay, hospice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estacadero</td>
<td>Station</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demora</td>
<td>Demoralization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raconch</td>
<td>Fort</td>
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<td>Reducedion</td>
<td>Reduction</td>
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<td>Congregation</td>
<td>Congregation</td>
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<td>Fidelidad</td>
<td>Fidelity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peso</td>
<td>Weight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolos</td>
<td>Load</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ingleso</td>
<td>Gentleman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Borguero</td>
<td>Hunter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enchima</td>
<td>Helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chenlania</td>
<td>Humber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>Piece of silver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silver bull</td>
<td>Silver bull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearty bull</td>
<td>Heart bull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver navel</td>
<td>Silver navel</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Mechanisms of expansion and the evolution of expeditionary forms

In the Caribbean one did not speak of "conquest"; not until the mainland phase would actual campaigns and pitched battles be standard fare. Still, in this as in other aspects, mainland practices would grow out of Caribbean precedents. The idea of direct crown supervision of overseas expansion, insofar as it had ever had substance, faded rapidly in the face of the realities of the Indies. Spanish occupation of vast territories of America was to occur relay fashion, each new area becoming the base for another push forward. The essential initiative was local; local conditions determined the timing, and personnel, capital, and materials were organized locally. Because of distances and inherent tensions, each new area soon became independent of the last. The process was somewhat as follows: A senior and powerful figure or figures in a given area would propose the acquisition of a known but still unoccupied territory within reach, and the local governor would approve the venture, even helping organize it, in the hope that the new acquisition would be a part of his own jurisdiction. But no sooner would the leader of the expedition meet with success than he would write off to the crown asking for a separate governorship, which would usually be granted. (This was often the first the crown heard of either the leader or the new region.) In such a fashion Puerto Rico and Cuba became independent of Santo Domingo, then Mexico independent of Cuba, and on and on, to the far edges of the Indies.

We have already discussed in general the impetus given by the two different traditions of European expansion and more specifically the effect of mineral and population depletion in pushing the Spaniards on past the Caribbean islands toward the mainland. Certain social-political tensions among the Spaniards tended to accelerate the process even more. Two elements among the settlers were often volatile and discontent: on the one hand, some of the most senior, wealthy, and influential, who chafed to have a governorship for themselves, and, on the other hand, late-arriving Spaniards who hoped for encomiendas and were satisfied with nothing less. In effect, the former led the latter off to new areas, nudged or helped along by governors and established settlers who were happy enough to see them gone. In this connection, though the Caribbean receded from the forefront and Spanish interest went elsewhere, there was no wholesale exodus from the islands. Rather, those who had any sort of established position stayed on, as was to happen again and again as new areas were occupied. The motor of expansion was not adventure but poverty and rivalry.

Concerning the complex topic of the organization, social composition, and functioning of conquering expeditions, we need say only enough to demonstrate the continuities pointing both backward and forward. As spectacular an episode as conquest was, it had strong components of commercial capitalism and of permanent settlement. In other words, it embodied the Caribbean experience. The conquering groups transmitted the customs of their base area to the new areas where they became the most senior and powerful encomenderos and imposed their ways on the new arrivals from Spain attracted by their success. Acts as transcendent and permanent as the foundation of major cities and delineation of protonal jurisdiction were carried out by the conquering groups in the ordinary course of their activities. Thus conquest was not a hiatus before settlement but an integral and vital part of settlement.

Expedition forms underwent an evolution related to other Caribbean trends. The early expeditions going out from Hispaniola to hunt for slaves and trade for gold or pearls were organized on a mercantile basis. Two or three wealthy men would make the whole investment and hire the rest. But with capital scarce and yields uncertain, increasingly the entire group would invest something and agree to share profits according to investment. By the time the Spaniards came to the mainland in force, the practice was well established that group members (except the sailors) were partners in an enterprise, expecting a share in gold or slaves or an encomienda if it came to that, rather than a salary. The entrada, or "entry" (into new lands), could serve equally well to trade, raid, or conquer, according to what was found. Thus the slave raids of the Caribbean, the great conquering expeditions of the central areas, and the later, often futile explorations in fringe areas represented different uses of the same basic organizational form. By the time of the mainland phase that form had departed from the maritime-commercial compahia to become more the Iberian reconquest compahia, or band of men, though with traces of the former still touch in evidence.

The leader of a major expedition would invariably be a man of standing in the base area: usually an important encomendero, member or former member of the municipal council, senior in the area, wealthy, and an hidalgo or passing for one. Both Cortes and Pizarro fit this mold, though Cortes had somewhat more education than usual and Pizarro less. The leader would sport the title "captain," which was not a rank in a hierarchy but simply meant "leader in an
expedition.” He and some associates who became subsidiary captains made the largest investments, usually in ships, clothing, weapons, and horses. The ordinary members supplied their own equipment and provisions (though sometimes these were purchased on credit from the captain). The men had no connection with a royal army, received no pay, had no uniforms, no rank, and in nine cases out of ten no professional military training or experience. Only distant or posterior commentators have called them “soldiers,” a term they never applied to themselves during the conquest years. They were of many types. Among the 168 men who seized the Inca emperor at Cajamarca in 1532, there were about a dozen notaries; perhaps twice that many working artisans, including smiths, tailors, and carpenters; men of merchant background; an ecclesiastic; a Black piper and crier; seamen; members of the lower nobility; people from both urban and rural backgrounds; men from all regions of Spain; in a word, a cross section of Spanish society, indistinguishable from the general stream of Spanish immigration to America in following decades. It was groups like these, accompanied by numerous naboria auxiliaries from the base area, which carried out the mainland conquests and set up a new social framework in the conquered lands.

Patterns of conquest and resistance

From the earliest years on the island of Hispaniola, the Spaniards were aware how greatly easy entry and quick control could be facilitated by capturing the cacique. The idea may have been suggested by precedents from earlier Iberian contacts with Moors and Africans. At any rate, surprise seizure of the local ruler during a friendly parley was a standard tactic. The actions of Cortés and Pizarro with the Aztec and Inca emperors were run-of-the-mill and entirely predictable. In the Caribbean the Spaniards also learned to expect that some peoples would accept Spanish overlordship voluntarily, or even aid the intruders, often in order to win advantage over traditional indigenous enemies.

Fighting was often necessary, however. Only the secondary powers in a given region would make terms; the dominant group could be counted on to resist strongly, often even after the loss of the ruler. The Spaniards entered the central areas of the mainland, with their populations mounting into the millions, their strong kingdoms, empires, and warlike traditions, in expeditions numbering usually from 200 to 500 men and invariably won decisive victories within a short time. The weaponry of the sedentary peoples could neither stop nor seriously harm someone equipped with a steel sword, steel helmet, and some sort of shield and thick clothing, where there was at least minimal room to maneuver, groups thus equipped were irresistible against as many indigenous opponents as could be brought to bear against them, until they should tire. Here the horse proved invaluable, so much so that a horse counted as much as a person in the division of treasure, and the horsemen were always the leaders and senior, wealthier men. Fifty horsemen with lances, or even as few as twenty, could roll back or split up an Indian army, however large, at will. Horse and foot could relieve each other indefinitely. In a battle on flat ground and against sedentary peoples, victory for a mixed body of Spanish horsemen and footmen was a foregone conclusion. Indian fatalities could be in the thousands; Spanish casualties were ordinarily restricted to superficial flesh wounds, and the rare fatalities were more in the nature of accidents. In 1536–7 some 180 Spaniards holding off perhaps a hundred thousand or more besiegers for more than a year in the Inca heartland, at Cuzco, suffered one fatality, that of a man fighting without his helmet. Firearms were unimportant, too few and too slow to deal with Indian numbers. Strategy was equally unimportant, if only the Spanish leader had the prudence to keep his men out of constricted places. The high mortality rate among the conquerors was attributable primarily to disease and fighting among each other, and secondarily to losses of isolated small groups which were in highly disadvantageous positions or off their guard after initial victory. At root, then, the Europeans of the sixteenth century had a technical military advantage over the sedentary peoples of America as overwhelming and decisive as that which the Europeans of the late nineteenth century acquired over the peoples of Africa and Asia with the repeating rifle and the Gatling gun.

Courage and skill were abundantly present on the Indian side. What little anyone in their situation could do, they did. Generally they tested and double tested the results of battle before capitulation. In a confined place, through weight of numbers, Indians could and sometimes did almost literally smother the Spaniards. In a very steep or narrow place one could hurl stones down on their heads, and this the Indians quickly learned to do when there was any opportunity. In 1536, during a great general Indian rebellion in Peru, Pizarro sent out one thirty-horsmen contingent after another in relief of Cuzco; each one in turn was annihilated in mountain passes. But the Spaniards soon caught on.

Among all the sedentary peoples, the Aztecs of the Valley of
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Mexico were best situated to offer resistance to Spanish conquest. Tenochtitlan, their capital, was surrounded by a great lake, accessible only by narrow causeways with removable bridges at intervals, and the city itself was tightly built up with stone and adobe walls and crisscrossed with canals. Under these conditions the Aztecs were able to pen up and force out a large party of Spaniards who were already on the island and then to resist a prolonged siege by a reinforced expedition with many Indian allies, their former enemies and subjects. Even when the Spaniards fought their way down the causeways they faced obstacles and contrivances rendering their usual procedures ineffectual, and the Aztecs were able to resupply themselves by boat. Only by drawing yet deeper on European technology and constructing large vessels equipped with artillery were the invaders able to dominate the lake and starve the city out. At the same time, the Spaniards progressively razed the buildings and filled in the canals, creating a plain on which their usual advantage was restored.

The only alternative to an ultimately futile resistance was to flee the good lands of sedentary life and take refuge in mountain or forest fastnesses. This possibility was not open to the bulk of the population and was not generally adopted for more than fleeting periods, though an Inca splinter group held out in a remote tropical forest river valley for more than a generation after the end of the conquest proper (without much effect on the general course of events). It is true that vacillation on the part of Indian leaders some times resulted in Spanish control earlier than would have been absolutely necessary. Both Moctezuma, the Aztec emperor, and the Inca emperor Atahualpa wavered between understandable overconfidence, curiosity, and equally understandable apprehension of a total unknown until the Spaniards were in their very presence and it was too late. But submission under these conditions was not in itself decisive. In a very short time a serious armed rebellion would almost always occur, carried out by people who were now coming to realize the full implications of a European presence; after initial successes owing to surprise and Spanish scattering, the decision would again be the same, for the same reasons as in primary conquest. Thereafter, the sedentary peoples would never again pose a threat to Spanish occupation and dominance.

As to Indian allies of the Spaniards, for a perspective on them one needs to understand first that they often became allies precisely because of the intruders' military power and second that in the conquests their primary role was in support and logistics. Tlaxcala is from islands to mainland

a classic example. The Tlaxcalans suffered two weeks of steady defeat in hard battle before deciding that the best thing to do was to help the Spaniards against their traditional enemies, the Mexica. Something of the role of the Tlaxcalans, who accompanied the conquistadors over all Mexico, can be seen in the fact that many never returned home, but instead became naborias in the vicinity of the various Spanish cities.

The double trajectory of conquest

Conquest spread outward from Hispaniola in two great, approximately simultaneous thrusts in the direction of the (at first unsuspected) central areas: one to Panama and then Peru, the other to Cuba and then Mexico. Sometimes one of the two streams would take the lead, sometimes the other. The southern thrust reached the mainland first, in Tierra Firme (that is, Mainland), from 1509 forward. Here, for the first time, were indigenous peoples whose accumulations of precious metals were large enough to allow the Spaniards to pay off their debts and conquer further immediately, without going into placer mining first, though of course they did that soon enough too. Here encomienda was first transferred to the mainland, and conquest began to assume its classic form. On the other hand, the northern thrust was the first to take one of the empire areas, the territory of the Aztecs, in 1519–21, whereas the southern thrust, held back by a detour to Nicaragua and difficult sailing conditions on the Pacific coast of South America, did not take the central lands of the Incas until 1532–3.

Hardly were the two central regions provisionally occupied when another series of expeditions, the largest and best equipped yet, went out from them as bases, sped along by the capital, antagonisms, expectations, and strong continuing Spanish immigration which the great conquests spawned. As a result, all the fully sedentary areas in America had been located and occupied by 1540, and occupation of the contiguous semisedentary areas was well under way. As the dates on Map 3 indicate, things proceeded much more slowly in the latter areas, but even there, regional capitals had generally been founded by 1550.

Despite some contact between the two major streams, all in all they were remarkably separate, resembling each other principally because they were such direct continuations of the Caribbean complex and because they met such parallel sets of conditions. Above all Mexico had no major impact on Peru merely by virtue of some
regions at that time. The importance of these ventures was thus mainly negative. The most famous are: Hernando de Soto from Cuba (financed by money from the conquest of Peru) into the North American southeast in 1539–42; Gonzalo Pizarro into the Amazonian region from Quito in 1541–2; and Coronado from Mexico into the northern borderlands in 1540–2. A great expedition under don Pedro de Mendoza, though inspired by Peruvian successes, departed directly from Seville and thus bypassed the step-by-step tradition of the Indies. The Plata venture failed in its attempt to occupy the Buenos Aires region in 1535–6, proving the untenability of the pampa region in the sixteenth century, but nevertheless led to permanent settlement in Paraguay, to which we will return in a future chapter. After this, there was little more to know and even less to exploit, since by this time the Portuguese had established themselves among the remaining semisedentary peoples of the eastern coast of the southern continent, and Spanish America settled down with borders and territorial units much the same as those it has today, except that the plains areas were still largely empty of effective Spanish settlement.

Map 3. The path of Spanish conquest.

years precedence: the Tierra Firme encomienda was the model operating in Peru, not the Mexican variant (in any case nearly identical), and Pizarro was certainly not thinking of Cortés and Moctezuma when he seized Atahualpa; he had been capturing caciques in Tierra Firme long before Mexico was heard of.

At the same time as the wave of post-Mexico–Peru thrusts into contiguous populated areas, some major expeditions went out with the same intention into regions more remote but failed to find people or resources indicating that Spaniards should occupy those

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