

SECTION

1

READ TO DISCOVER

1. Why did Columbus sail west?
2. How did Native Americans react to Columbus?
3. Why did the *encomienda* system develop, and how did it affect American Indians?
4. What reforms did Bartolomé de Las Casas urge the Spanish Crown to undertake?

DEFINE

viceroy  
*encomienda*

IDENTIFY

Christopher Columbus  
Taino  
Guacanagarí  
Bartolomé de Las Casas

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

Christopher Columbus was the first European to explore the Caribbean. Today many Caribbean nations have a mix of European, Native American, and African cultures. Use [CNNfyi.com](http://CNNfyi.com) or other **current events** sources to learn about Caribbean culture today. Record your findings in your journal.

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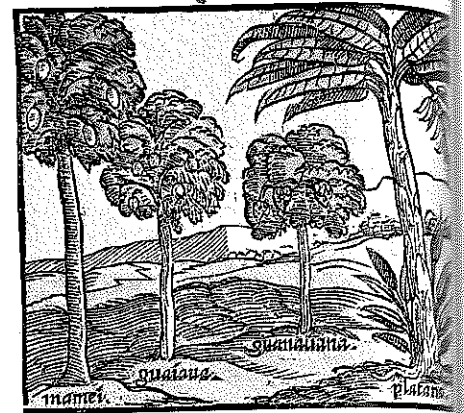
# First Contact

EYEWITNESSES  
TO History

“[The islands were] full of trees of a thousand kinds, so lofty that they seem to reach the sky. . .

Some of them were in flower, some in fruit. . . And the nightingale was singing, and other birds of a thousand sorts, in the month of November.”

—Christopher Columbus, quoted in *Original Narratives of Early American History*, edited by E. G. Bourne



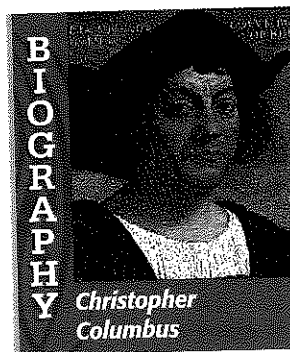
Colored woodcut from 1572 of the fruit trees on the island of Hispaniola

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## Christopher Columbus

By the 1400s, Europeans desired a cheaper, faster trade route to the East that did not involve traveling through the Mediterranean Sea. Portugal took the lead, concentrating on finding a sea passage around the southernmost tip of Africa. Spain, however, looked westward—largely because of the boldness and imagination of one man, **Christopher Columbus**. In 1492 Columbus set sail from Spain on the first in a series of historic Atlantic crossings. Like most sailors of his time, Columbus believed that Earth was round. He concluded that if he sailed far enough west, he could establish a more direct trade route to Asia.

Columbus grew up in Genoa, a bustling port city on Italy’s northwestern coast. Fascinated by the sea, the adventurous youth sailed on Genoese trading vessels. He quickly became an excellent navigator. A former shipmate recalled Columbus’s skill: “By a simple look at the night sky, he would know what route to follow or what weather to expect.”



Eventually, Columbus made his way to Lisbon, Portugal, the center of European knowledge about sea travel. While in Lisbon, he studied charts of contemporary geographers and astronomers. He also read summaries of ancient Greek and Roman texts, the Bible, and Marco Polo’s exciting account of his travels in Asia. As a result of his studies, Columbus developed a theory about a westward route to Asia. Breaking with the scientific theories of the time, Columbus concluded that the western sea could not be very large. He

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## DEFINE

viceroi  
*encomienda*

## IDENTIFY

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Taino  
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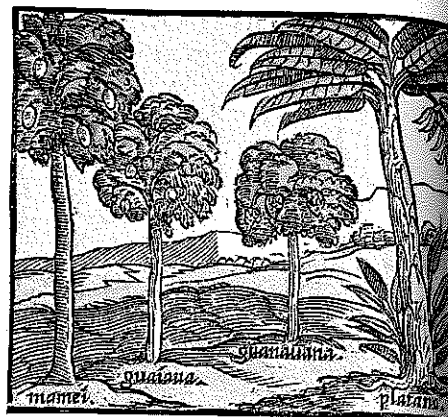
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## EYEWITNESSES TO History

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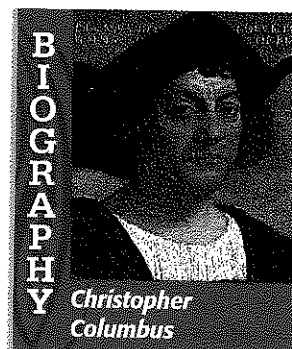


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believed that the great trading cities of Asia lay only about 2,400 miles west of Portugal. Some scholars thought it was more than 10,000 miles westward from Europe to the Indies (Asia). The actual distance to Asia did prove to be about 12,000 miles—almost five times greater than Columbus had calculated.

In the 1480s Columbus tried in vain to persuade various European monarchs to sponsor a westward voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. In 1484 he asked John II of Portugal to “give him some vessels to go and discover the Isle of Cypango [Japan, as described by Marco Polo] by this Western Ocean.” King John rejected the plan because he doubted the accuracy of Columbus’s calculation of the distance to Asia.

Initially, Columbus had no better luck with the Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. Columbus persisted, however. He described to them the golden palaces and temples of Asia mentioned in Marco Polo’s tales and tempted them with visions of the riches that could belong to Spain. Columbus also vowed to take the Catholic faith to the peoples of foreign lands. This idea impressed the deeply religious Ferdinand and Isabella. Nevertheless, only after the monarchs had defeated the Muslims at Granada in January 1492 were they willing to back an expedition. On April 17, 1492, the king and queen authorized the necessary funding for Columbus’s journey.

To reward Columbus for his future discoveries, Ferdinand and Isabella agreed that the mariner would be knighted, appointed an admiral, and made **viceroi**, or governor, over all the lands he might discover. In addition, he would receive at least 10 percent of the riches he obtained on Spain’s behalf.

✓ **READING CHECK: Categorizing** Why did European monarchs fund exploration voyages?

## The Fateful First Voyage

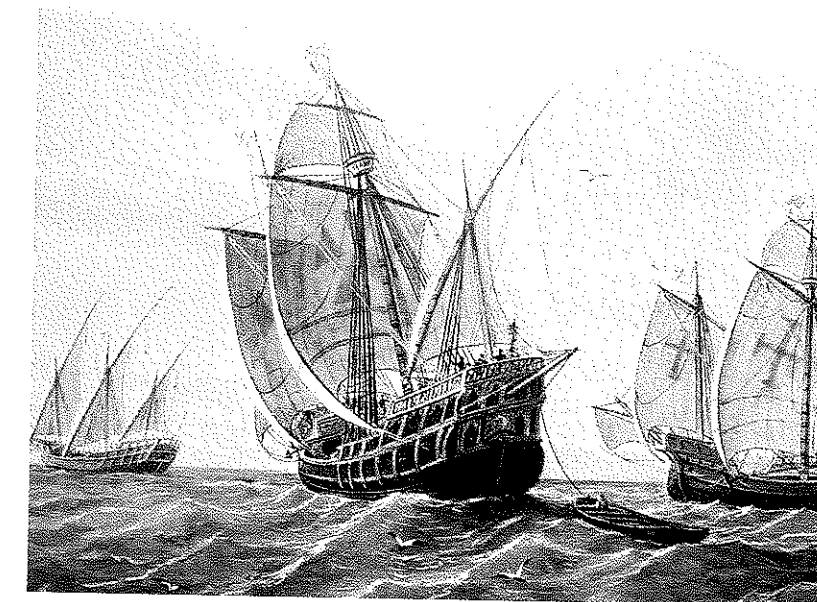
Columbus outfitted three ships—the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*—and recruited a crew of some 90 sailors, most of whom were Spaniards. At dawn on August 3, 1492, Columbus and his crew departed from Palos, Spain. The small fleet first journeyed approximately 820 miles southwest to the Canary Islands, Spain’s westernmost possession. Going so far south allowed Columbus’s ships to catch the fast-moving trade winds of the Atlantic. Then, in September, the three vessels set out for a long journey across the uncharted sea.

After a month at sea, the men had not sighted land since leaving the Canaries. The crew’s patience was wearing thin. Many sailors hoped that the ships would turn back. In the early morning hours of October 12, as the lookout on the lead ship scanned the horizon, he shouted out the long-awaited cry: “*Tierra!*” Land!

**The people of the Indies.** The October 12 entry in Columbus’s *Journal*, his diary of the voyage, reads: “[At] daylight Friday . . . they reached an islet . . . which was called Guanahani [gwahn-uh-HAHN-ee].” Columbus and his men struck land



Marco Polo’s adventures were translated into many languages, inspiring many young explorers. This edition was published in Germany in the late 1400s.



## INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

**Columbus’s voyage.** After a month at sea, Columbus’s crew kept constant watch for any sign of land such as birds, cloudbanks, or green weeds. **Based on this image, where would be the best place to keep a lookout for signs of land?**

## Research on the ROM

### Free Find:

#### Columbus and the Taino

After reading the letter in which Columbus describes his contact with the Taino on the **Holt Researcher CD-ROM**, imagine that you are a Taino Indian. In that role, write a letter to a friend describing your experience and thoughts when you saw Columbus for the first time.



### INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

**Columbus's arrival.** This painting, completed during the 1800s, depicts Columbus's landing on a Caribbean island. **What clues does this painting provide about the purposes behind Columbus's voyage?**

on a tiny coral island in the central Bahama Islands, about 400 miles southeast of present-day Florida. Columbus named the island San Salvador, meaning Holy Savior. Confident that he had reached Asia—the so-called Indies—the admiral called the island-dwellers *Indios*, the Spanish word for “inhabitants of the Indies.”

The American Indians Columbus encountered called themselves **Taino** (TY-noh), the word for “good” or “noble” in their Arawak language. The Taino were farmers and fishers who lived in small settlements. Some groups traded salt, shells, and other goods peacefully with their neighbors. Other groups participated in raids against neighboring islands. Groups with more complex social and political organizations lived on the larger Caribbean islands, such as present-day Cuba, Hispaniola (his-puhn-YOH-luh), Jamaica, and Puerto Rico.

The Spanish praised the Taino's generosity. “They invite you to share anything that they possess, and show as much love as if their hearts went with it,” noted Columbus. He believed that it would be easy to convert them to Catholicism. He also took the Taino's generosity to mean that they “could all be subjugated [conquered] and compelled to do anything one wishes.”

**The search for gold.** Because some of the Taino wore small gold ornaments, Columbus concluded that gold mines must be nearby. During the next month, the explorers sailed from island to island—naming and claiming each for Spain—in search of gold. Then, on Christmas Eve, 1492, the *Santa María* either landed or was

shipwrecked off the island that Columbus had named Hispaniola—the site of present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Columbus decided to establish the first Spanish colony there. He named the settlement La Navidad, meaning “the nativity,” in honor of Christmas, the day of its founding.

Like the inhabitants of Guanahani, the American Indians of Hispaniola were generous to the Spanish. Their chief, **Guacanagarí** (gwah-kahn-uh-gah-REE), showered Columbus with gold nuggets and ornaments—even promising “a statue of pure gold” the size of Columbus himself. This impressive display convinced some of Columbus's men to remain in the settlement.

Columbus sailed back to Spain in January 1493, taking with him about two dozen Taino captives and evidence of the Indies' riches. Ferdinand and Isabella gave him a hero's welcome. They greeted Columbus with the titles they had promised: “Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy and Governor of the Islands that he hath discovered in the Indies.” The monarchs speedily approved a second voyage.

The captive islanders who survived the voyage became the objects of both sympathy and curiosity in Spain. The queen ordered that the Indians on Hispaniola and elsewhere in the Americas be treated humanely and converted to the Roman Catholic faith. However, she left open the possibility that anyone who resisted the authority of the Spanish Crown could be enslaved.

✓ **READING CHECK: Summarizing** How did Columbus respond to the Native Americans he encountered?

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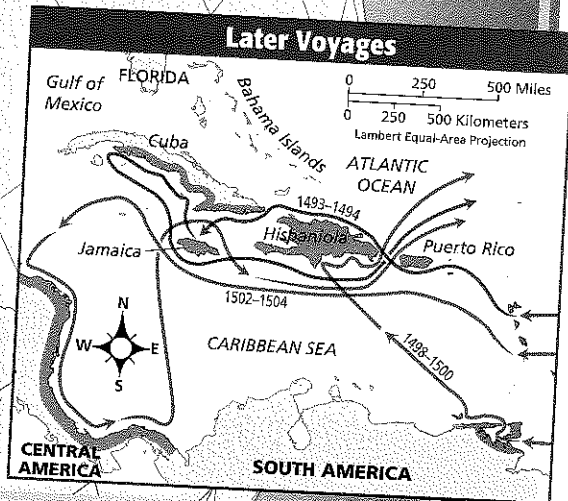
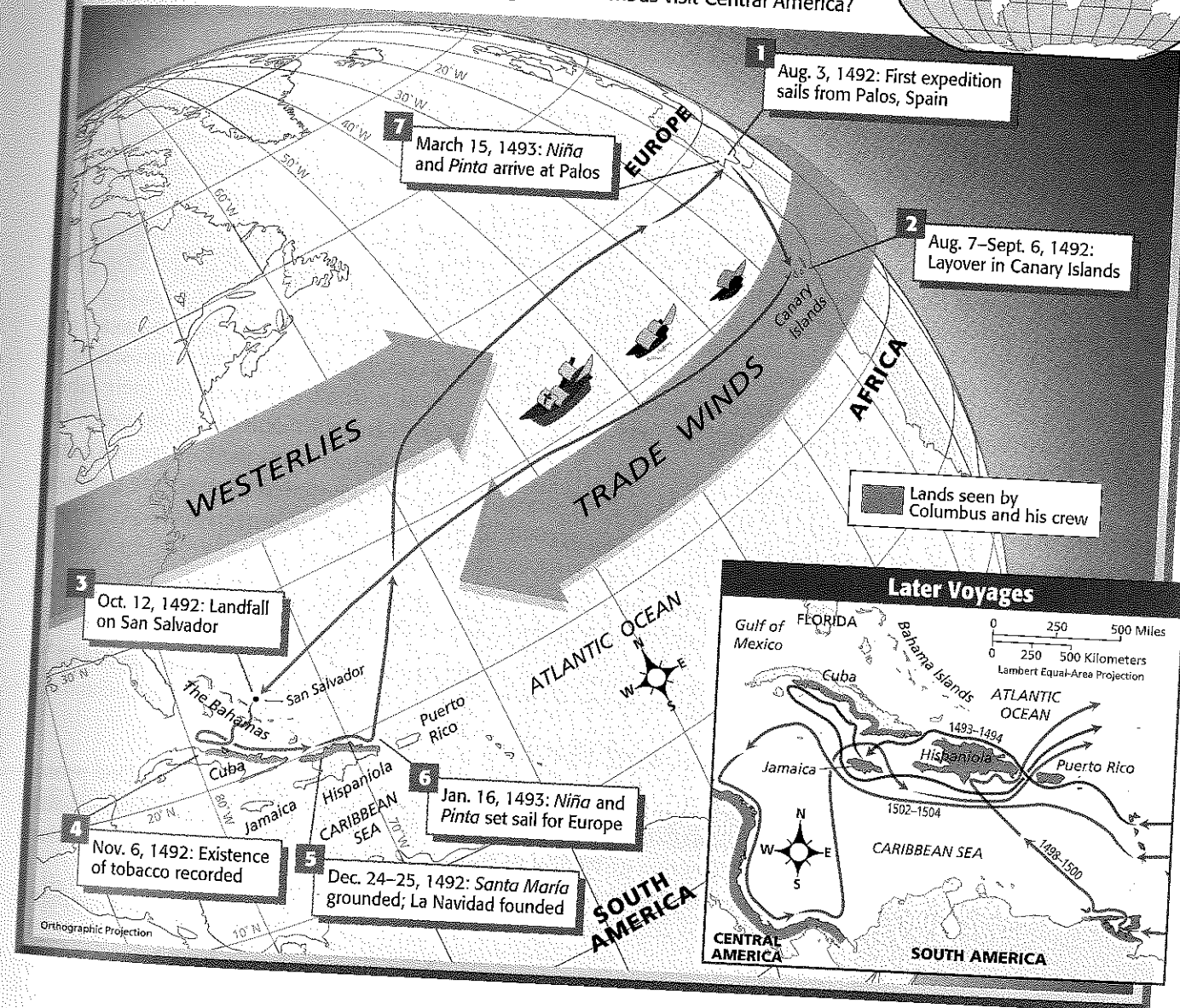
### INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

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## The First Voyage of Christopher Columbus

**Interpreting Maps** Christopher Columbus made four round-trip voyages to the Americas between 1492 and 1504.

**2 PLACES AND REGIONS** On which voyage did Columbus visit Central America?



**Columbus the colonizer.** When Columbus returned to La Navidad 11 months later, he found the colony destroyed. All the Spaniards were dead or gone. Some probably had left to find gold, but most had either fallen victim to illness or died in disputes with one another or with the Taino. Columbus ordered the construction of another settlement, Isabela. He then left the settlement under the care of his brother Bartolomé and spent the next three years sailing the Caribbean searching for gold. While Columbus was away, the pressure the colonists put on the Taino to provide food and gold provoked the Indians to revolt. Columbus’s failure to maintain order eventually led the monarchs to replace him as viceroy.

Before his replacement, Columbus granted the colonists control over Indian labor, introducing what would become the *encomienda* (en-koh-mee-EN-duh)

## Great Debates

### The Columbian Legacy

**H**istorians offer different interpretations of the lasting significance of Columbus's voyages to the Americas. In 1992 the 500th anniversary of

Columbus's first voyage brought these differences of opinion to the height of historical debate. Traditional historians applauded Columbus for expanding Western civilization and enlarging geographic knowledge. Others blamed him for introducing slavery to the Americas and for the massive reduction of the Native American population.

Historians who hold the traditional viewpoint see the legacy of Columbus's voyage as almost entirely positive: Europeans brought civilization to the relatively small populations living on the American continents. European culture, they argue, was significantly enriched as contact brought changes in government, religion, and science. Eventually, the United States—often considered the world's champion of democracy and individual liberty—was created as a result of this contact between hemispheres.

Other historians believe that Columbus's voyage had fatal consequences for both the "Old" and "New" worlds. They note that the Europeans enslaved people and generally had little regard for the cultural heritage of the peoples they met. In addition, European diseases helped destroy entire civilizations. Some historians try to balance these viewpoints, considering both the positive and negative effects of Columbus's voyages.

system. Under this system colonists, or *encomenderos* (en-koh-muhn-DE-rohs), received the right to have a certain number of American Indians work for them. The *encomenderos* used the Indians to build houses, mine gold, and provide food. The system required that the *encomenderos* instruct their workers in the Roman Catholic faith and permit them to grow food for themselves.

Queen Isabella learned in 1499 that 300 settlers had returned from the Indies, each with an American Indian slave given to him by Columbus. She became very angry. In her eyes, Indians were not slaves. Rather, they were supposed to be paid a small allowance for their labor. Over Isabella's objections, however, the *encomienda* continued. In practice, the system amounted to group enslavement for many Indians because they were seldom paid.

✓ **READING CHECK: Analyzing Information**  
What was the purpose of the *encomienda* system?

### Las Casas and Slavery

Some Spaniards protested the harsh treatment of American Indians. One prominent critic, **Bartolomé de Las Casas**, had lived for some years as an *encomendero* in Cuba. He spent a great deal of time giving religious instruction to the Indians under his care. Las Casas, however, began to question the system.

Las Casas urged Spanish colonists to live and work peacefully with the Indians. He also asked that friars and priests convert Indians to Catholicism gradually, through "love, gentleness, and kindness." In his *Apologetic History of the Indies*, published in 1566, he argued that the Indians' humanity equaled that of Europeans.



**Bartolomé de Las Casas** urged the Spanish government and settlers to treat the Indians with more humanity.



“Not only have [the Indians] shown themselves to be very wise peoples and possessed of lively and marked understanding, . . . but they have equaled many diverse nations of the . . . past and present . . . and exceed by no small measure the wisest of all these.”

—Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apologetic History of the Indies*

Few Spaniards shared the views of Las Casas. Within a century, however, the *encomienda* had largely ended. The enormous decline of the American Indian population, rather than humanitarian concerns, was responsible. Many Indians died from overwork and malnutrition, but many more died of disease.

European diseases proved particularly deadly because the American Indians had no immunity to them. The Western Hemisphere's isolation from the rest of the

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world meant that American Indians had never been exposed to common illnesses in Europe and Africa such as chickenpox, measles, smallpox, and typhus. When Europeans and Africans arrived in the Americas, they unknowingly introduced the organisms that caused these diseases.

In some remote areas the epidemics preceded the appearance of the Europeans, since the diseases spread easily from Indian to Indian. No doubt the resulting devastation made it much easier for the Spanish to conquer the Indians. One Maya chronicle records the effects of an epidemic.

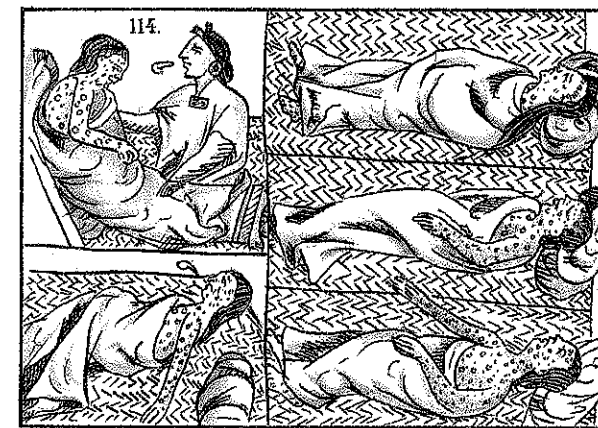


**"Great was the stench of the dead. After our fathers and grandfathers succumbed [died], half of the people fled to the fields. . . . The mortality was terrible. Your grandfathers died, and with them died the son of the king and his brothers and kinsmen. So it was that we became orphans, oh, my sons! So we became when we were young. All of us were thus."**

—Cakchiquel Mayas, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels and Title of the Lords of Totonicapan*

Although the death rate for American Indians varied, in some areas their numbers had declined by more than 90 percent by the mid-1500s. To replace Indian laborers, the Spanish began importing African slaves. The first slaves reached the West Indies in the early 1500s. By 1540 at least 10,000 enslaved Africans were arriving annually in the Spanish colonies. Many enslaved Africans performed hard labor on sugar plantations or other large farms. This is a tragic example of how European exploration in the Americas affected people's lives throughout the world.

✓ **READING CHECK: Identifying Cause and Effect** How did the *encomienda* system contribute to the rise of slavery?



#### INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

**Diseases.** This illustration from the 1500s portrays the devastating effects of smallpox on the American Indian population. **According to these images, what symptoms did the American Indians experience after catching European diseases like smallpox?**

## SECTION 1 REVIEW

**1. Define and explain:**  
viceroys  
*encomienda*

**2. Identify and explain:**  
Christopher Columbus  
Taino  
Guacanagarí  
Bartolomé de Las Casas

**3. Comparing** Copy the chart below. Compare the goals that various people had for American Indians and the methods they proposed for achieving those goals.

	Goals for American Indians	Methods
Columbus		
Isabella		
Las Casas		

**4. Finding the Main Idea**

- How did the *encomienda* system benefit the Spanish settlers? What effect did it have on American Indians?
- Why did the reforms that Bartolomé de Las Casas proposed for American Indians achieve only limited success?
- Imagine that you are a Taino living on San Salvador. Draw or describe a plan for a mural that portrays your interactions with the Spanish explorers.

**5. Writing and Critical Thinking**

**Identifying Cause and Effect** Imagine that you traveled with Columbus. Explain how European trading goals changed the course of the history of the Americas. **Consider:**

- how trade led to the search for new trade routes
- how this search affected Columbus's route
- how Columbus's landing in the Americas shaped its history



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