The story of Texas begins many thousands of years before the birth of Christ, when ice masses connected the continents of Asia and North America, spanning points in what we now know as Siberia and Alaska. Between 12,000 and 40,000 years ago, until the Bering Sea reclaimed this bridge of ice for good, Asiatic nomads of the same *Homo sapiens* group that became today's Mongoloid race trekked across it in a series of distinct migrations as they hunted for edible plants and animals.

Scientists now agree that American Indians descended from a relatively small number of parent migrants who contributed to the "founding" gene base. Once the broad ice fields of the Bering Strait had melted, the ancestors of the American Indians were cut off from other Asians. Thereafter, natural selection and genetic mutation helped to produce distinctive physical types.

Through the ages, these ancient nomads dispersed throughout the vast lands of North and South America. Different cultural and linguistic patterns appeared as bands struck out on their own in the search for fresh sources of game and vegetation, and as people sought to adjust to diverse habitats. Cultural patterns further evolved over time as New World peoples began to develop agriculture, around 7000 B.C. Once New World societies learned to till the soil and harvest plants, human beings began to exercise some control over nature and developed strong ties to the land. Family units eventually formed into complex social and political organizations. Religious figures emerged as leaders or spiritual advisers, and the roles of males and females became more clearly delineated. As each group sought survival from its local environment, regional distinctions developed, as evidenced by the different types of housing, aesthetic decoration, clothing, and tools used by the people of particular regions.
Various groups and cultures spread throughout all regions of the New World. Though historians disagree over population estimates, most concur that more people lived in what we now know as Latin America than remained in North America. At the time of Columbus’s voyage in 1492, roughly 12 million people lived north of the line dividing present-day Mexico and the United States; between this boundary and the Isthmus of Panama lived an estimated 35 million people; finally, some 60 million people inhabited the continent of South America and the Caribbean Islands.

Of the pre-Columbian civilizations, that of the Maya has generally been considered the most intellectually advanced. Situated in what are today the Yucatán Peninsula and Guatemala, the Maya, during the height of their civilization (about A.D. 300 to A.D. 900), made brilliant advances. For example, the Maya’s discovery of the zero cipher, well before Arab mathematicians introduced the concept to Europe in the thirteenth century, allowed them significant achievements in architecture, astronomy, and calendars. Speculation lingers as to why the Mayan civilization declined. A deadly disease may have spread throughout the population, natural catastrophes may have produced food shortages, or a social revolution to undermine the ruling class may have hastened their demise.

Another major civilization thrived for a time at Anáhuac (Valley of México), this of the Toltecs, who raised a mighty empire at Tula until drought and famine forced them to desert their capital city. In 1215, new barbarians named the México, but more commonly known as Aztecs, arrived from unknown parts in the north and built upon the collapsed Toltec empire by establishing themselves in Tenochtitlán, today’s Mexico City. One of the cleanest and most populous cities in the world at the time of its “discovery” by explorers from the Old World, Tenochtitlán contained pyramids, royal palaces,
and other large structures, homes for the several social classes, canals crafted from stone that served as waterways for canoes, botanical gardens and zoos, and causeways connecting the island city to the mainland. Although the Aztecs had a warlike disposition and a penchant for human sacrifice, they abided by strict codes of morality, esteemed education, adhered to an honest and efficient system of legal and political administration, and excelled in various branches of the arts.

In South America another civilization flourished at the time of the European conquest of the Western Hemisphere. Embracing an area extending from today's Ecuador to Chile, the Inca civilization had its headquarters in Cuzco, in present-day Peru, and ruled through a remarkably efficient system of civil administration. A road system superior to any in Europe at the time enabled government officials to carry out their responsibilities, laborers to travel throughout the empire to maintain public works, and soldiers to move quickly in order to protect the realm and suppress rebellions. Unsurpassed by other Native American civilizations in architectural skills, the Incas designed and built structures that flexed with the tremors of earthquakes, resuming their original forms after each jolt. The Incas also possessed advanced scientific skills. Amazingly, archaeological findings point to their apparent success in performing brain surgery.

The Indian tribes that inhabited the North American continent generally developed less sophisticated civilizations. The Northeast Woodlands Indians, found from the Ohio Valley to the Atlantic Ocean and southward to the Chesapeake Bay, lived in loghouse villages or in wigwams and survived by farming corn, squash, and beans nearby their homes, or by hunting deer and wild fowl and fishing from canoes. Among the most famous of the Woodlands tribes was the Iroquois, who despite their renown as warriors organized the famous League of the Iroquois. Considered the most effective Indian alliance north of the Aztec Empire, the League succeeded in ending the chronic bloody conflicts among its member tribes.

South of the Woodlands tribes, stretching from the Atlantic Coast to the Mississippi Valley and even into East Texas, lived a culture group that maintained ties to mound-building societies of a past age. These were the Choctaws, Seminoles, Chickasaws, Creeks, and Cherokees—later referred to by Anglo Americans as the “Five Civilized Tribes” because they adopted Euro-American ways. The most famous of the descendants of the mound builders were the Natchez. At the time of the European exploration of the area, trappings of the classic Natchez era remained evident in villages along the lower Mississippi River. These villages surrounded temple mounds and ceremonial council houses, the identifying traits of the ancient mound builders.

A third advanced culture group that flourished at the time of Europeans' arrival in the Western Hemisphere was located roughly from what is now West Texas to Arizona, and north as far as southern Colorado. Here the Hopi and Zuñi created a distinctive cultural heritage. These tribes, who belonged to a group that Spaniards referred to collectively as Pueblos, resided in planned towns consisting of stacked, apartment-type complexes, sometimes two or more stories high. For defensive purposes, the Pueblos built their adobe villages into rock walls or upon steep mesas and structured them so as to oversee the spa-
cious streets and squares below. In the fifteenth century, the Pueblos cultivated corn and other crops, developed irrigation canals, used cotton to make clothing, and lived much in the same manner as did the European peasant of the same period.

The Indians of Texas

Anthropological evidence reveals that before the Europeans arrived, a number of distinct culture groups lived in the varied geographical areas of what is now Texas. Such pre-horse people shared numerous characteristics, certainly the result of evolutionary processes, adaptation to historical situations, and common responses to environmental factors. Generally, Native Americans bonded around self-reliant bands or extended families. Leaders rose through the ranks, gaining their positions by a proven display of bravery, wisdom, or special attributes. Their religion embraced the supernatural; today, it would be said that they were animistic. They thought, for instance, that natural objects—whether the galaxy, Earth’s geographical landscape, the flora or fauna—had an existence that paralleled that of humans and could be summoned for help in times of need. These culture groups recognized social distinctions among themselves and relegated some of their members to a lesser place in the social order. Among those assigned to a secondary status were women, who performed tasks that men shunned. Women cared for the household: cooking, preserving foods for later use, and fashioning animal skins into clothing. Women maintained a close contact with the land, cultivating it, foraging for edible products, and gathering clay from which they made cooking utensils or wares to be traded with other Indian nations.

Certain shared traits notwithstanding, Native American civilizations in pre-Columbian Texas were quite diverse. Several of the peoples had different places of origin, some tracing their lineage to culture groups in the modern-day U.S. South, northern Mexico, or the Rocky Mountain region. No common language united Native American groups in Texas. While some made war with or raided neighboring groups regularly, most preferred to avoid conflict and lived in terror of attacks by aggressors. Numerous peoples preferred a sedentary life, while others maintained a nomadic existence. Adaptation to local environment tended to separate one culture group from another. Thus, one Texas tribe might build villages (and reside in permanent dwellings constructed of cane and grass) and rely on farming, while another might stay on the move, living in portable shelters such as hide teepees as they migrated seasonally to gather wild vegetation or pursue game, trapping their prey and killing it with clubs and other crude weapons. Region also determined a group’s economy, as livelihoods might turn on agriculture, hunting big game such as the American bison (commonly known as buffalo), or perhaps a mixture of both combined with intertribal trade.

The Coastal Indians

Along the coast of southern Texas and in parts of the Trans-Nueces lived the Karankawa and Coahuiltecan peoples. Both groups had common roots in modern-
day northern Mexico: the Coahuiltecs were tied linguistically and otherwise to the Native inhabitants of Coahuila. The Karankawas and the Coahuiltecs lacked formal political organization: social life revolved around the family, extending into small autonomous bands (related by kin) presided over by a chieftain. Their religious life was primitive, and they believed that supernatural entities governed the cosmos.

Their respective environments of marshy terrain close to the Gulf Coast and the chaparal of the brush country were harsh ones. The territory of the Karankawa extended along a thin area running down the coast from Matagorda Bay (some archaeologists believe even as far north as the Lower Brazos River region) to Corpus Christi Bay, while the Coahuiltecs lived in the Gulf Coast Plain and much of what is today considered South Texas. Both tribes moved frequently, their migrations generally corresponding to the change of seasons. Over the years, the nomadic Karankawas and Coahuiltecs had learned the ecology of their respective regions well; they knew when nature produced its greatest yields and the precise grounds where such bounties lay. Indeed, they tended to live in the same general site during one part of the year before moving on to another favorite camp. To guarantee a reliable and abundant food supply, during the fall and winter months the Karankawas stayed close to the coast, where they relied heavily on shellfish, aquatic plants, and waterfowl, but also hunted deer and even alligators. For life along the bays and lagoons, the Karankawas built small canoes from tree trunks and made nets, an assortment of traps, lances, and bows and arrows. The Coahuiltecs also preferred to inhabit specific locations during the winter, places where they could expect to find abundant roots and other easily attainable foodstuffs. During the spring and summer, the Karankawas moved inland to the coastal prairies and woodlands. There they relied less on marine life (though numerous rivers and creeks still provided them with fish) and more on land animals—among them deer, rabbits, prairie fowl, and occasionally buffalo—and the annual offerings of nuts, beans, and fruits produced by indigenous trees and shrubs. During the warmer seasons, the Coahuiltecs foraged for nature’s yields over the large expanse of South Texas. They took advantage of the spring rains, catching fish trapped in receding pools of water, and hunting deer, lizards, birds, fish, insects and gathering mesquite beans, prickly pears, pecans, and roots. Dome-shaped wigwams covered by animal skins or improvised windbreaks served as the most common type of Karankawa and Coahuiltecan housing. When it came time to move, they simply dismantled their shelters, taking them and other useful items with them.

**The Northeast Texas Indians**

East of the Trinity River, tribes related to the Indians of the Mississippi Valley prospered, among them the Caddo. Many centuries before Europeans had realized the existence of the New World, people roamed the lower Mississippi River expanse in quest of edible plants and small game. About 500 B.C., however, these hunting-and-gathering peoples turned to farming, cultivating a variety of vegetables, among them corn, beans, and squash, but also tobacco for personal use. Around A.D. 1200, the Mississippian civilization reached its high point of
cultural growth and tribal strength before entering a gradual decline. The Caddo Indians of Texas constituted the westernmost flank of Mississippian culture, owing much to it in the way of farming, village life, and religion, though the Caddo had also borrowed cultural traits from tribes to the west (in New Mexico) and the south (Mexico). While Mississippian culture in general was in a state of decline when Columbus sailed from Spain, Caddoan civilization was thriving.

Caddo settlements extended from the Trinity River, due north past the Red River, and as far east as the Mississippi River. Stable communities—consisting of isolated rural villages as well as clearly outlined urban sites—were generally located on the best farming lands in the region. Close to sources of fresh water (primarily rivers and streams), the Caddo constructed dome-shaped homes from grass and cane. As many as four families shared one such domicile, for Caddo home life apparently revolved around multifamily dwelling. With fields surrounding their settlements, the Caddo had easy access to their principal source of sustenance. Like peoples in the other parts of the world at the time, the Caddo planted twice a year—in the spring and early summer—tended the plants (generally corn, squash, and beans) with the utmost attention, rotated the crops periodically, fertilized the soil (the Caddo used the droppings of animals native to eastern Texas), and stored the excess harvest carefully for use during lean times.
Chief's known as the *xinesf* presided over Caddo society, both as political and religious leaders. Serving in a hereditary position, the *xinesf* (whose authority extended over several Caddo communities) mediated between his followers and a supreme deity—the world's creator who influenced both good and bad things in life—and led religious celebrations, ceremonies, and festivals. In Caddo society, the *xinesf* was a person demanding of respect from tribal members, who looked up to him as a powerful figure able to determine such phenomenon as a successful sowing; as such, the *xinesf*'s wishes and directives were to be followed unquestionably. Under the supervision of the *xinesf*, the Caddo constructed impressive temple mounds (signature traits of their Mississippian kin) that served as storehouses and as places in which to conduct important meetings and ceremonies. Below the *xinesf* in the Caddo religious order were lesser medicine men who attended to the spiritual as well as the physical needs of the people. Adept in the use of medicinal herbs and various folk remedies, these healers treated a multitude of wounds and illnesses.

Governing individual Caddo communities (also through hereditary right) were the *caddi*. Such rulers were members of the upper stratum. While mostly disqualified from holding office, a commoner might elevate himself to a leadership position through feats of bravery on the battlefield. Ostensibly, the Caddo administrators ruled efficiently, for at the time that Spaniards began their exploration of Texas, the Caddo world flourished. Lieutenants enforced the policies determined by the *caddi*, directing commoners in their tasks of tilling the soil, building shelters for all concerned, and seeing to the public good, which included defending the nation from outside threats. War, however, was not integral to Caddo culture. Indeed, they undertook attacks on neighboring tribes primarily as a form of release for young men craving to act out their bravado, or as opportunities for others wanting to rise in social status.

Although they primarily relied on farming for their sustenance, the Caddo supplemented their diet through other means. In addition to gathering roots, nuts, and fruits, a task usually performed by women, the Caddo hunted the wild game indigenous to eastern Texas: turkeys, rabbits, or quail in the summer; deer and bear (useful for lard, clothing, and shelter) in the fall and winter; and buffalo (present on the western rim of the Caddo confederacy) when the supply of other foods grew scarce during the colder months. Comfortable in their stability and self-reliance, the Caddo also engaged in extensive trade. Eventually the Caddo world served as a hub for those bringing goods from as far away as New Mexico, northern Mexico, and the Mississippi Valley. The Caddos welcomed many trading partners, bartering their baskets, tools, ceramics, decorative art, and weapons for certain types of vegetables, furs, and other luxury items not otherwise available to them in East Texas.

**The Jumano Indians**

Another group inhabiting Texas in the final years of the fifteenth century was the Jumanos, who inhabited the Trans-Pecos area. Ethnographers and other scholars still disagree over the distinct features of Jumano culture. Opinions also differ as to what specific peoples (or tribes) made up the Jumanos, what linguistic groups they derived from, and the precise regions they occupied.
Some studies note that the term Jumano, as used by the first European observers, delineate those descendants of the Tanoan-speakers, a linguistic group from New Mexico, or those tribes that made their living as traders and traveled as far east as the South Plains of Texas. To some anthropologists, the word Jumano identifies people of a shared cultural background, and not necessarily a general grouping of people with a common language or a specific livelihood.

Recent research presents the Jumanos as descending from the Mogolón, a people indigenous to modern-day Arizona, New Mexico, and neighboring regions. Sometime in the mid-fifteenth century, part of the Jornada tribe began migrating eastward towards the Trans-Pecos, ultimately establishing permanent settlements in the West Texas river valleys such as El Paso, but more specifically in the region that the Spaniards later referred to as La Junta de los Ríos (the confluence of the Rio Grande and the Rio Conchos). Quite plausibly, the whole of western Texas became the domain of the Jumanos—more militant tribes such as the Apaches and Comanches would not enter the region until sometime in the seventeenth century—for what were most certainly Jumano settlements (many of them temporary) have been found beyond the fertile river valleys. In any case, the Jumano civilization stretched from eastern New Mexico and perhaps into Oklahoma, and south to northern Chihuahua in Mexico, with its easternmost appendage extending into the South Plains. In these hinterlands, they made a living by farming and hunting.

At La Junta de los Ríos and other permanent settlements, the Jumanos worked irrigated produce gardens, cultivating traditional farm crops such as maize, beans, and squash. The Rio Conchos and the Rio Grande provided them with a variety of fish. Jumano communities resembled those used by their

![Image of a Caddo house typical of those built by the Wichita Indians in northeastern Texas. Courtesy of the Caddoan Mounds State Historical Park, Texas Parks and Wildlife.]
kinspeople in New Mexico—clustered single-family dwellings constructed of reeds and grass formed a village, over which a chief ruled. Such farm hamlets were indicative of the branch of the Jumanos that had opted for a sedentary life, though certain village members left on seasonal hunting expeditions.

Hunting nearly full time became the unique trait of the nomadic Jumanos of the West Texas plains. Living in transient camps, this branch of the Jumano people roamed the vast grasslands throughout the spring and fall in pursuit of a variety of game: from snakes, fish, and birds, to deer, antelope, rabbits, armadillos and, naturally, the indispensable buffalo, which furnished them with meat for food and hides for shelter and clothing. During winter, the hunters relocated near the more permanent villages of their farming relatives, launching the hunting cycle anew in the spring.

Both the sedentary and nomadic Jumanos earned reputations among the Spaniards (who entered the world of the Jumanos in the seventeenth century) as accomplished merchants—as noted above, some Europeans used the word Jumano synonymously with trader. La Junta de los Ríos served as a distribution hub for provisions, trade items, and intelligence coming in from northern Mexico, the Indian villages of the upper Rio Grande, the world of the Coahuiltecas, or from the exchange marts of the Caddo. The nomadic Jumanos appear to have made commerce as much a part of their way of life as was hunting, establishing trading villages on the plains as centers of exchange. In these posts, they bartered products manufactured or acquired by the tribespeople—bows and arrows, pearls, and animal furs and hides. But they also traveled widely to exchange horses (stolen from local ranches in northern New Spain), buffalo products, and foodstuffs for vegetables and fruits raised by local tribes, woolen textiles or pottery produced in New Mexico, or wares and foods available through the Caddos' own commercial network.

The Plains Indians

Strikingly different from the aforementioned Native American tribes were the Apaches, Comanches, Wichitas, and Tonkawas. None of these Indian peoples—all of whom would play important parts in Texas history during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—lived in Texas in pre-Columbian times. Their origins may be traced to the northern Rocky Mountain region of the present-day United States. The Apaches, for instance, were related linguistically to tribes in Canada and Alaska, while the Comanches had originally made their homes in the valleys of the upper Yellowstone and Platte rivers. No one knows when exactly these tribes commenced their pedestrian migration into the Great Plains (the geographical expanse immediately east of the Rocky Mountains) and the Southwest in the pursuit of buffalo. Historians do know that these Plains Indians found new power in the horse (acquired in the seventeenth century from raids upon fledgling Spanish settlements or by capturing wild herds), for they learned to ride horseback with great skill while hunting buffalo, conducting warfare, or relocating to newer locales.

A number of forces ultimately led the Plains Indians toward Texas. Mounted warfare produced winners and losers; the Comanches—the most successful because of their high mobility and unmatched riding skills—became such a terror
on the Plains that the Apaches (namely the groups known as the Lipans and the Mescaleros) by the late seventeenth century began heading south to take refuge in Texas. So did the Wichita from Oklahoma and Central Kansas, though they sought haven from their enemies attacking them from the upper Mississippi Valley. The Comanche, meantime, continued expanding their nomadic hunting grounds southward, pursuing buffalo on horseback, fighting the hated Apaches, and bolstering their pony herds by rounding up wild horses. For their part, the Apaches in their retreat southward threw so many lesser Texas tribal units into disarray that in Central Texas there formed a disparate group of refugees that collectively came to be known as the Tonkawas. As with the Apaches, the Tonkawas were no match for the Comanches, who by the early 1700s had arrived in Texas to become the dominant force in the northern, central, and western regions of the province.

In Texas, the Apaches, Comanches, Wichitas, and Tonkawas depended on the buffalo for almost all their essential items, including food, shelter, clothing, weapons, and tools. Using bows and arrows, the Plains Indians effectively hunted not only buffalo but also deer, antelope, turkeys, and other wild game. Small garden plots, however, provided a secondary source of food, and some of these bands raised maize and other vegetables including squash and beans. They also gathered berries and other domestic fauna such as agave, from which they made intoxicating beverages. Additionally, wild plants gave them herbs, fruits, and other products that they consumed themselves and used in barter.

The Plains Indians lacked any pan-tribal political structure, so families formed the basic social foundation. Groups of families under a chief composed working units that served to defend the people or to retaliate against other groups for wrongs inflicted. In some cases, their livelihood depended as much upon preying on other tribes who had items they needed for sustenance as it did upon reaping nature’s bounty. Fiercely independent, the Plainspeople held religious views that allowed for individual relationships with deities; their faith in a single, all-powerful being was only ephemeral. Shamans, or religious figures, exerted no great authority among the wanderers of the Plains, as they mainly served to heal the infirm.

The Iberian Legacy

The first white people that the indigenous inhabitants of Texas encountered came from the Iberian Peninsula—a part of Europe in which history had departed in substantive ways from that of the rest of the continent. The early history of Spain, however, does not belie this difference. Like the rest of Europe, the Iberian Peninsula had come under the rule of the Greeks and later was subsumed by the Roman Empire. From the Romans, Spaniards derived their language, law, customs, religious faith, and the name of their country—Hispania. When Spain, along with the rest of Europe, fell to the barbarians in the fifth century, the Visigoths swept over the peninsula and superimposed their way of life over that which the Romans had instilled. Like other Europeans, the Iberians then began forging new lifeways that combined the Roman influence, the newer Germanic contributions, and evolving
Christian beliefs, for in Spain, as elsewhere, the Visigoths ended up assimilating the religion, language, and form of government of the people they had conquered.

The Muslim Era and the Reconquista

What chiefly separated the history of the Iberian peoples from that of the rest of western Europe was the conquest of Spain by Muslims from northern Africa (Arabic or Berber peoples known loosely as the Moors) who sought to spread their Islamic faith. Partly because of the Muslim domination of the peninsula, which began in A.D. 711, feudalism did not attain maturity in Christian Spain. The constant state of warfare to oust the Muslim intruders equalized social distinctions, thereby blurring class differences then prevalent in northern Europe. In each Christian state, furthermore, the war bolstered the role of the king as the military leader responsible for the reconquista (reconquest), the term generally used to refer to the centuries of struggle to regain Spain from the Muslims. Following a tradition used by the Moorish invaders, Christian fighters surrendered one-fifth of the spoils of their conquests to the monarch—a custom that granted further power and wealth to the Crown. Since the Muslims were among the world’s best-connected merchants, their influence helped Spain enjoy brisk economic activity with the Islamic world. Numerous Spanish cities became commercial hubs as their merchants developed prosperous ties with their counterparts in Africa, the several Mediterranean countries, and the Muslim world of the Middle East. Even Iberians who earned their living from the soil participated in the economic good times, as they sold their produce in domestic as well as export markets.

Castile and the Legacy of the Reconquista

Efforts to resist the aggressors and reconquer the motherland molded Spanish culture during the Middle Ages. Of the several Christian states that individually or jointly sought to push back the Moors, none excelled Castile, the heartland of Spain stretching from the peninsula’s northern lands southwardly to the central plateau. Castile’s campaign to expel the Muslim interlopers turned into a way of life that accentuated the warrior hallmarks of valor, tenacity, intrepidity, and survival at any cost—traits embraced by the conquistadors (conquerors) whatever their social station.

Through time, moreover, the Castilian reconquista assumed the aura of a religious crusade. The discovery in the year 900 of what Spaniards believed to be the burial site and body of the apostle Santiago (St. James the Great) in northern Spain, inspired Spanish religious fervor, for St. James supposedly had brought Christianity to Iberia. The reconquista prompted the Crown to bestow the role of ally upon the Catholic Church, and the Church’s preachings in behalf of the war rendered numerous social and political privileges to the clergy. By the thirteenth century, Catholic religious orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans engaged in proselytizing activity among the Spanish Muslims.

The reconquista also encouraged the raising of sheep in agrarian Castile, for the Castilians found that sheep produced higher and quicker profits than did their crops. And unlike crops, herds could be moved quickly out of harm’s
way during the constant warfare. When stockmen imported merino sheep from northern Africa in 1280, the Iberians bred them with their native stock. The new strain produced such a superior grade of wool that merchants in the international market eagerly sought the product, which brought handsome profits.

Cattle raising also flourished in the reconquered areas of southern Castile. In Andalusia, lords raised breeds of cattle that became widely known for the fine quality of their beef and hides. Seasonally, vaqueros, mounted herd- ers, drove the stock cross-country from the northern summer grazing lands to winter in southern pastures. The vaqueros developed a distinctive dress and equipment, as well as cattle-ranching traditions and practices such as the rodeo (roundup) and the branding of calves for identification purposes, which were later transplanted to areas that came under Spain’s dominance.

Compared to other various European urban centers, which experienced economic downturns, Spain’s cities witnessed a good deal of development, for in the process of reconquest, towns held down and consolidated the gains of battle. In return for their assistance in helping to regain territory from the Muslim “infidels,” towns received charters by which the king guaranteed townspeople the protection of their individual possessions and privileges and permitted them a semblance of self-governance. During this period, city inhabitants came to belong to ayuntamientos (city councils), which elected town officials. Furthermore, they organized hermandades (brotherhoods) responsible for maintaining the peace. This new form of municipal government replaced the old Roman administrative structure that had broken down following the arrival of the Muslims.

Los Reyes Católicos

The two Iberian kingdoms of Castile and Aragón united in 1479, when Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragón, married since 1469, inherited the thrones of their respective dominions. Seeking to consolidate their power over the whole peninsula, the monarchs swiftly pressed for the pacification of the countryside and the su- coordination of the nobles, the Church, and the military orders, which had gained power during the final stages of the reconquista. The couple’s strategy for accomplishing their plans proved shrewd and inventive—even cunning. In order to suppress criminal activity, for instance, Isabella co-opted the medieval institution of the hermandad, turning what had begun as municipal brotherhoods to defend mutual interests—ironically against the nobility—into a standing army for the Crown. Political gains made by individuals at the local level during the reconquista thus receded as los reyes católicos (the Catholic kings) began the task of molding Spain into a sovereign nation.

With a semblance of peace and unity restored domestically, the monarchs turned their attention to foreign policy. By the fifteenth century, technological advances enabled Spain to expand its commerce. Much of the new technology came from Portugal, where Prince Henry the Navigator had made brilliant strides in map making and ship building in an effort to see his own country be the first to probe
the African coastline, establish sea routes to the Orient, and find a friendly ally for a beset and Christian Europe. As fate determined, it was Portugal’s rival, Spain, that used Henry’s inventions to discover a world completely unknown to Europe.

**Columbus**

In 1492 Isabella gave consent to the Italian mariner Christopher Columbus to sail under the flag of Spain in a westerly course to the East Indies. Columbus’s principal motives were economic and political gain, but a desire to spread his religion also prompted him. If successful, he would achieve great things for Spain and Latin Christendom.

From the port of Palos in southern Spain, Columbus, in command of three caravels, steered toward the Canary Islands, already claimed and colonized by the Spaniards. After reprovisioning there, the crews headed into the strong Atlantic seas never before sailed by Europeans. The admiral reckoned he would reach the Orient in thirty days, tap its riches, and in the process establish new allies and trading partners for the Christian world and open vast new lands for religious proselytizing. On October 12, 1492, after more than a month at sea, Columbus sighted land. But he had not reached Asia, as he had assumed he had; rather he came ashore on the modern-day Bahamas. He named the first island on which he stepped *San Salvador* (Holy Savior).

**The Conquistadores**

Following Columbus’s grand find, Spain proceeded swiftly to transform the “New World,” as the Europeans had dubbed it, into colonies that would provide the Spaniards with the elusive riches they had hoped to reap by finding a shortcut to the Orient. Now a new wave of conquistadores, who in many ways resembled those who had reclaimed the peninsula from the Muslims—having ousted the last of the Moors from Granada in 1492—took the initiative for the acquisition and subordination of new dominions. Characteristics of the traditional conquistador—courage and tenacity, but also callousness, a propensity toward violence, religious zeal, and a desire for gold and glory—typified those who led the conquest of the New World.

Columbus himself played a major part in the takeover of the Caribbean Islands, but the exploration, and exploitation, of the New World proved too vast for one man’s energies. Numerous explorers thus left what had been labeled the “West Indies” for fresh explorations, among them was Vasco Nuñez de Balboa. Balboa ultimately crossed the Central American Isthmus, and in 1513 he claimed the Pacific Ocean on behalf of the king of Spain. In the same year, Juan Ponce de León reached Florida, bringing the North American peninsula into the Spanish sphere, though the Spaniards did not succeed in settling the region until the 1560s. The expedition to establish control over modern-day Mexico was spearheaded by several intriguing war campaigns led by Hernán Cortés, who by 1521 had conquered and plundered Montezuma’s Aztec empire, paving the way for the ruthless domination of the rest of Mexico. In Peru, conquest of the Incas fell to an unlettered conquistador named Francisco Pizarro, who arrived there in 1532, eventually executed the emperor, and despoiled buildings and
shrines of their treasures throughout Inca settlements. Blood, rapine, and plunder marked the Spaniards' path through Peru, as it had their swath through Mexico.

**Looking for Fortunes in Texas**

Just as the atmosphere of fifteenth-century Spain helped to mold the ruthless nature of the exploring Spaniards, so, too, did it shape their desire to find riches and amass fortunes. Many people in late medieval Europe still believed in romantic tales of mythic adventure, and books describing fantastic places of great riches and enchantment stimulated Spanish hopes of finding the fabled land of the warlike Amazon women, of the opulent Seven Cities, and the legendary Fountain of Youth. The very real treasures (gold and silver, principally) that the
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conquistadores did find in Mexico and in Peru only encouraged their people's convictions that the dreams of lore were indeed realizable in the New World.

It was this search for great fortune that led the Spaniards to the land now known as Texas. The earliest European penetration of what was to become Texas occurred accidentally in 1528, shortly after Pánfilo de Narváez led 400 men into Florida. Landing first near today's Sarasota Bay, Narváez took three-fourths of his crew ashore with him to investigate stories of a golden land. Narváez and his men were left stranded on Florida's west coast, however, after miscommunications prompted his ships to depart for Cuba without them.

Improvising, Narváez and his fellow castaways killed their mounts, fashioning five small boats from the horse hides, in which they hoped to float along the Gulf Coast and eventually reach Mexico. But on a spit of land close to the western portion of modern-day Galveston Island, the Spaniards were shipwrecked and forced to brave the winter of 1528–29. Enslaved by a band of coastal Indians, only a handful of the Spaniards, among them Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Estevanico, a Moorish slave, survived into the spring. After years in bondage, and with their number now down to four, Cabeza de Vaca persuaded the others to escape and follow him. Posing as “medicine men” as they traveled, the Spaniards undertook a remarkable odyssey that led them across the Rio Grande, at a spot northwest of present-day Roma, Texas, then on through northern Mexico and eventually back into Texas, near today's Presidio. From there they trekked along the east bank of the Rio Grande, towards a site some seventy-five miles below El Paso, then back across the Rio Grande into Mexico and, finally, into the Spanish frontier town of Culiacán, in the western province of Sinaloa.

Upon his arrival in Culiacán in 1536, Cabeza de Vaca had much to tell, including tales of riches existing in the lands somewhere north of those he had roamed. To confirm his reports, the Crown in 1539 dispatched Friar Marcos de Niza to the northern lands, with Estevanico accompanying him as a scout. In present-day western New Mexico, the friar, supposedly viewing a Pueblo Indian town from a distant hilltop, reported upon his return of having seen a glittering city of silver and gold. Niza's fabulous vision may be accounted for by the reflective quartz imbedded in the walls of the adobe dwellings sparkling in the sunlight, but Spanish officials interpreted his testimony as evidence of the existence of the fabled Seven Cities. Their general location was deemed Cibola, a term meaning buffalo, which the Spaniards had heard the Indians use and now applied as a place-name to the pueblos of the Zuñis.

Historians question whether or not Niza actually traveled as far as Cibola, but whatever the truth, Niza's report raised expectations among the Spaniards, and the viceroy assigned Francisco Vásquez de Coronado to lead a follow-up expedition. Coronado arrived in Zuñi country the next year, only to discover that Niza's glittering cities were, indeed, merely adobe complexes. Conflict soon brewed with the Pueblos, for Coronado and his troops mistreated the villagers and inflicted numerous indignities upon them, even burning some Pueblo people at the stake. After this, newly generated tales of a golden kingdom called Gran Quivira induced other parties of Spaniards to venture out upon the Great Plains, but as they crossed what we know today as the Texas Panhandle, none saw anything of value to themselves or the Crown.
At first, Coronado refused to be disillusioned, continuing his search for Gran Quivira near the land of the Wichita tribes in Kansas. But two years of futile searching finally convinced him to return to Mexico, and his reports of the absence of riches in the lands he had traversed discouraged further exploration of the north for another half-century.

While Coronado was exploring the Plains, another expedition, this one led by Hernando de Soto, made its way from Florida to Alabama and across the southeastern Mississippi Valley, tracking down rumors of gold treasures and civilized cities. This quest also proved fruitless, and de Soto, despairing of his failure, took ill with fever and died in the spring of 1542. His party, now situated on the Mississippi River, was taken over by Luis de Moscoso de Alvarado, who opted to march west in hopes of reaching Mexico. During their trek, the Spaniards entered eastern Texas and may have ranged as far west as the Trinity River, near present-day Houston County. Frustrated that they had not yet managed to reach Mexico, Moscoso and his men returned to the Mississippi, building crude boats and floating downstream and then westward along the Gulf Coast. Destiny forced the sailors ashore near present-day Beaumont. Two months later, the 300 men arrived in the Spanish town of Panuco, Mexico, with, of course, no reports of having found riches. This report further dampened the Spaniards’ desire to explore Texas.

**Competition for the North**

By the early part of the seventeenth century, Spain’s New World dominion extended nearly 8,000 miles, from southern California to the tip of South America. But Spain could claim no monopoly over the world discovered by Columbus,
for several other European countries now competed for their share of colonies in the Western Hemisphere. The Dutch laid claim to the Hudson Valley and New Netherlands, the settlement that later became part of the English colony of New York. The French, meantime, founded Quebec in Canada and launched the occupation of Nova Scotia. As time passed, French traders pushed southwestwardly into the Great Lakes area, and by the 1650s they had infiltrated the general region around what is today the state of Wisconsin.

Most determined of the seventeenth-century efforts were those of the English, who explored along the Atlantic Coast north of the lands chartered by Ponce de León, Pánfilo de Narváez, and Cabeza de Vaca. By the 1640s, the English empire had established solid possession of the Atlantic seaboard between northern Florida and New England. Britain now prepared to expand its mainland North American empire west, toward areas that the Spaniards regarded as exclusively their own.

**Colonizing Baggage**

The edge Spain had over its competitors were the skills of colonization, for by the seventeenth century the trappings of Spanish civilization (much of it a legacy of the reconquista) were well in place throughout much of Latin America and ready for relocation to North American frontiers. Responsible for coordinating settlement was an autocratic king, who since the conquest of the Aztecs had passed along royal orders to political bureaucracies responsible for the day-to-day affairs in Spain’s respective New World colonies. Although these field officials tended to mold royal directives and laws to fit local circumstances, they implicitly recognized the king’s right to set policy and their duty to acknowledge his decisions.

The king, however, did not act haphazardly in bringing Indian lands under the Spanish flag. To the contrary, he oversaw an orderly process of expansion and settlement by employing those agencies already proven effective against the Muslims or tested on the frontiers of the New World. The military garrison and fort called the presidio, the roots of which lay in the Roman concept of praedium (meaning a militarized region protected by fortifications), for example, was initially employed in the last half of the sixteenth century as protection against the Chichimeca Indian nations that inhabited the north-central plateau of New Spain. From the Indian frontier north of Mexico City, the core government deployed the presidio into other regions, each fort under the direction of a presidial commander acting in behalf of the governor and whose authority outweighed that of local civilian officials. The presidio served many functions. It was a place for prisoners to complete their sentences, and it provided a walled courtyard in which to conduct peace talks with representatives of restive Indian tribes. More important, as a garrison for soldiers trained and equipped for frontier warfare, the presidio protected another frontier institution—the mission—guarding the friars in the mission compounds as they attempted to pacify and instruct newly converted congregations of Native peoples.

The practice of conducting missionary activity among the Muslim occupants had been used in Spain during the reconquista, and it evolved into the system found in the Mexican north in the 1580s. Priests of different Catholic
religious orders (such as the Franciscans or the Dominicans) staffed the missions, performing various functions relevant to exploration, conquest, and Christianization. The missionaries sought to convert the Indians to Catholicism, establish friendly relations with hostile tribes, and, by their fortified presence at the mission, assist in retaining conquered territories for the Crown.

Missionaries acted for the government in a tradition traceable to medieval times, when the reconquista became a joint enterprise between the Crown and the Church. As Ferdinand and Isabella acquired the right to make appointments to religious positions (the patronato real) in the 1480s, the alliance between the king of Spain and the pope became even closer. By the time of the conquistadores, the Crown had won the right to regulate the Church in its American colonies (including making such decisions as where Church edifices would be erected), sponsor evangelical forays into pagan lands, and decide which religious order would take priority in missionizing particular regions. With these powers, the Crown controlled the pattern of Church activities in the New World, though doctrine and dogma remained strictly the domain of the clergy.

In their further efforts to Europeanize new lands, the Spaniards also used the civilian settlement, another institution employed during the reconquista to hold recently reconquered territory. As the Spaniards advanced northward from Anáhuac, they used the civilian settlement to populate frontier regions and integrate the hinterlands and their resources into the kingdom. By this time, the Spaniards had devised extensive laws governing the location, layout, and defense
of urban outposts. Again, these laws generally derived from previous experiences in urban settlement during the reconquista. According to these plans, the town plat was square and included one or more rectangular plazas, the main one constituting the town center, with outlying streets crossing one another at right angles. The east side of the central plaza was designated for church edifices, the west side for government and public buildings. This arrangement facilitated daily routines: the idea was to use the morning light for mass and other church operations, and then allow government officials to work late into the evening using the afternoon sun. Lots allocated to residents also conformed to the pattern of perpendicular streets oriented to the four cardinal directions. Lands surrounding the new urban sites were designated as public property that all residents could use to sustain themselves and their livestock. Other ordinances stipulated that sites for new municipalities be chosen only after thought had been given to matters of sanitation, the proximity of food resources, local weather patterns, and the prospects afforded for self-defense against raids by hostile Indians. Poblanos (settlers) made every effort to adhere to these regulations, but the contingencies of the moment many times dictated otherwise. In Texas, therefore, plans did not always follow the letter. Officials who belonged to a bureaucratic structure, the roots of which went back to the reconquista, governed these new municipalities.

The Spaniards also utilized the rancho (ranch) to help them claim unsettled areas. Stockmen and farmers invariably accompanied frontier expeditions, and, over the course of time, they played supportive roles in the Christianizing of the Indians and the defense of settled territories. Rancheros (ranchers) provided settlements with resources otherwise absent on the frontier, such as beef, pork, and wool, along with useful byproducts such as hides and tallow. This helped the missionaries retain Indian converts who otherwise might have chosen to run off in search of wild game more palatable to their diet than the friars' normal fare. The ranchers also helped presidial soldiers, not only by providing them with meat but by furnishing them with live animals necessary for farm work, freighting, and, of course, military expeditions of all kinds.

These, then, were the traditional institutions that Spain employed, albeit in a modified form, to settle the contemporary American Southwest, while the Dutch, English, and French sought footholds in the region east of the Mississippi River. Spain renewed its efforts to colonize New Spain's Far North because of the prospects of finding wealth, a persistent desire to Christianize the settled Indians reported by Coronado, and the need to protect the expanse from foreign encroachment. For by the late 1570s and 1580s, English pirates such as Sir Francis Drake began sailing along the California coast. In 1598, therefore, Don Juan de Oñate led an expedition into what would become Nuevo México; this operation resulted in the founding of Santa Fe in 1609. The establishment of this permanent settlement started the Spanish activity that led to their domination of Texas.

Western Texas

For years, Jumano Indians had traveled to the Pueblo country in New Mexico to conduct trade. In 1629, the Jumanos asked the Spaniards they met there to
visit them in their West Texas lands and instruct them in the religion to which
they had been introduced by the "Lady in Blue." According to some Church
historians, this personage was the Spanish nun Madre María de Agreda, who
asserted that she had spiritually visited New World lands through miraculous bi-
location. Whatever the truth to the mystery surrounding this figure, the Spaniards
responded to the invitation with an expedition to Jumano country in 1629 com-
manded by Fray Juan de Salas, and another one in 1632 led by the Franciscans.

Their desire to proselytize Native Americans notwithstanding, the Spaniards
also held interests in more mundane things in Jumano country: namely, freshwater
pearls (found in mollusks living in the western tributaries of the Colorado River)
and the countless buffalo on the West Texas plains. Also appealing to them was the
possibility that Jumano country might become a base for trading with the Caddo
Indians; the eastern tribes, according to the Jumanos, comprised a wealthy popula-
tion of many villages. In 1654, therefore, Diego de Guadalajara returned to Jumano
country in search of pearl-bearing conchas (shells) in the present-day forks of the
Concho River of West Texas. At that time, however, Spanish officialdom lacked the
resources to pursue their plans to trade with East Texas Indians through the Jumanos.

Finally, approaches to West Texas were made in 1683 and 1684. By now, the
Spaniards resided a bit closer to the Jumanos, for the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, in
which the Pueblo tribes attacked and destroyed the Spanish settlements of the
upper valley of the Rio Grande, had caused much of the Spanish population of
New Mexico to take refuge in El Paso (modern-day Juárez), where a Franciscan
mission, which sheltered a small band of Jumanos, had existed since 1659. From
this distressed and impoverished civilian settlement the Spaniards returned to West
Texas when the Jumano Chief Juan Sabeata asked that priests be sent to his land
in West Texas and, parenthetically, for assistance in countering threats from the
Apaches. Responding to Sabeata's request, Spanish authorities dispatched an expe-
dition led by Juan Domínguez de Mendoza and Fray Nicolás López down the Rio
Grande from El Paso to today's Ruidosa, Texas, then into the San Sabá River area,
where they established themselves at Mission San Clemente. From temporary quar-
ters there, the expedition's men slaughtered some 4,000 buffalo. In fact, Sabeata's
primary motive in luring the Spaniards into Jumano country may have been to get
the Spaniards to protect his people from the Apaches while the Jumanos hunted
buffalo. The Jumanos then planned to carry Spanish goods and trade them with
the Caddos of East Texas. But the Spaniards' motivations went beyond convert-
ing Indians and shielding Sabeata from the Apaches. Aside from the previously
mentioned desire to find pearls, acquire new sources of food or raw products (such
as hides), and to establish trading links with the Caddo, they sought to bring relief
to the starving civilian community in El Paso. They also surmised that exploring
West Texas might lead to an alternative site for settlement, for the El Paso region
seemed unable to produce basic necessities. Whatever the motives for all involved,
the Spaniards left after six weeks of hunting in San Clemente, returning to El Paso
with a bounty of buffalo hides, promising the Jumanos to return at a later date.
Eastern Texas

The Spaniards did not revisit the Jumanos in West Texas, for they became preoccupied with increased French activity close to the Gulf of Mexico. By the early 1670s, the French actively explored the middle of the North American continent from their bases in Canada, and now they planned to install a string of trading stores and forts to stretch all the way from the Great Lakes to the mouth of the Mississippi. They made important headway in doing so when in 1682 René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, traveled down the Mississippi and asserted title to all of the lands drained by the great river for France.

Promptly, La Salle made plans to lay more than symbolic claims to the Mississippi River basin. Intending to found a warm-water port for the French fur trade at a site above the mouth of the Mississippi River (or perhaps, as some historians contend, plant a post there to help France capture some of the gold mines in northwestern New Spain), he left France at the head of four ships (the Aimable, the Joly, the Belle and one seized by Spanish privateers in Haiti). La Salle and his colonists, which included some women and children, arrived in the Gulf of Mexico late in 1684 (the same year that the Spaniards were active among the Jumanos in West Texas). But because of the limited navigational knowledge of the seventeenth century and a reliance on hypothetically drawn maps, La Salle had mistaken the Río Escondido (the Nueces River) for the Mississippi River, so in February 1685 he ended up on the Texas coast at Matagorda Bay (or Espiritu Santo, as the Spaniards would later call it in the belief that La Salle had landed on the mythical Espiritu Santo Bay). Following the wreck of the Aimable, his crew sailed back to France on the Joly, leaving La Salle in unknown territory with only one ship and his original 180 colonists rapidly diminishing.

On Garcitas Creek (in today’s Victoria County), La Salle founded a temporary colony. While his remaining ship (the Belle) lay at anchor in Matagorda Bay with the supplies destined for his Mississippi venture, the Frenchman undertook an exploration in late 1685 into the Texas interior to determine the reaches of Spanish settlements. This expedition brought his party toward the Rio Grande and into the trans-Pecos region, though with disastrous results. To La Salle’s dismay, the Belle had wrecked during this absence, and to salvage something for his ambitious enterprise, the tired explorer, at the head of a seventeen-man party, decided to turn northward in the hope of reaching Fort Saint-Louis on the Illinois River (which he had established earlier) and from there send word of his plight to France. This gambit also proved unsuccessful, and in March 1687 La Salle died near the Trinity River at the hands of his own frustrated men, five of whom in 1688 succeeded in reaching France via Quebec. Karankawa Indians in early 1689 wiped out the survivors (about twenty-three) at La Salle’s fledgling settlement (known erroneously in Texas history as Fort St. Louis; in actuality, there never did exist a site or garrison in Texas that went by that name), sparing only a few children whom the Spaniards later recovered.

As unimpressive as it was, the French activity in the area nonetheless alerted the Spaniards to the danger of losing Texas and prompted them to reimpe-
ment the exploration of the eastern periphery of the northern frontier of New Spain. Starting in 1686 and continuing until 1690, the Crown dispatched Alonso de León (north from Nuevo León) on several expeditions, his fourth one in 1689 taking him to the remains of La Salle’s ill-fated colony on the Garcitas. The next year, the Spaniards explored past that location and made contact with the Caddo world, long regarded by the Spaniards as “the great kingdom of the Tejas” due to legends extolling the prosperity and magnificence of the Caddo.

Actually, the Caddos of what is now East Texas consisted of about 10,000 people; among those belonging to the Caddo nation were the Hasinai Indians, whom the Spaniards referred to as the Tejas, the Spanish rendition of the Hasinai word for friend, from which the state of Texas is named. Encircled by tribes hostile to their way of life, the Caddos stood prepared to defend their territory against any group that might try to encroach on it. The Caddos, however, freely accepted the Europeans upon their arrival, for they saw them as potential allies and trading partners.

De León and Fray (Father) Damián Massanet thus encountered no problem in setting up two missions (one of them being San Francisco de los Tejas, the first Spanish mission in Texas) among the Caddo when they entered their territory in 1690. The Spanish perceived the Tejas (Caddos) as a particularly stable tribe that adhered to religious beliefs that recognized the existence of but one supreme being. Moreover, they ascertained that the Caddos traded widely, exchanging their bows and pottery, as well as salt and other goods, with representatives of other bands, among them the Jumano. So many Indians from such great distances arrived in the Caddo villages in order to barter that the priests quickly envisioned the Caddo kingdom as the ideal setting for disseminating the Christian message in New Spain’s Far North.

Despite these seemingly ideal circumstances, the Caddos did not prove to be willing converts. For one thing, Christianity actually clashed with their religious beliefs. For another, the Spaniards had disrupted their traditional way of life. When Domingo de Terán, who had been named governor of what became the province of Texas, visited the Caddo in 1691 intending to found additional missions, his livestock indiscriminately trampled and fed upon the Caddos’ new farm harvests. This, along with the actions of “unruly” soldiers and imprudent overtures by the missionaries who violated Caddo protocol, made the Caddos resentful, leading the tribesmembers to retaliate by attacking the interlopers’ domesticated stock. Finally sensing hostility, the Spaniards retreated to Coahuila, leaving behind only a few missionaries to continue the work of Christianizing. But those few persons could no longer convince the Caddos of their good intentions, so by 1693 the Spanish had departed East Texas.

The departure proved temporary, for events from within and without New Spain forced a return to Caddo land. Father Francisco Hidalgo, who had worked with Massanet among the Tejas, desired to resume the work he had helped begin in East Texas. In addition, the French renewed their activity along the mouth of the Mississippi to thwart English plans to move westward from the Atlantic to the middle of the continent. When the French established themselves at Mobile Bay in 1702, then farther west at Natchitoches, in what is now western Louisiana, it gave the Spaniards cause for alarm.
While several motives had brought the French to the border of Texas, trade ranked high on the list. This became evident when in 1713 a French Canadian named Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, who had been trading successfully with Indians in Louisiana, appeared in Natchitoches with an array of merchandise and a determination to seek markets among the Spaniards.

Setting out across Texas, St. Denis and a small detachment of traders headed for New Spain proper. They arrived at San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande (some thirty miles downriver from today's Eagle Pass on the Mexican side) on July 19, 1714, where Captain Diego Ramón quickly arrested them, detaining the encroachers until word arrived from the viceroy early the next year that the Frenchmen should be taken to Mexico City for official interrogation. Once in New Spain's capital, St. Denis gave a revealing account of his purpose: the French had received a letter from Father Francisco Hidalgo the previous year describing the Tejas and asking if the French would support a mission for the Indians. St. Denis disclosed that the Tejas yearned for a continuation of Christian missionary work, especially that of Father Hidalgo. As for trade, St. Denis declared that he saw no legal bans against commercial intercourse between French and Spanish territorial possessions.

Whatever the pretext, the viceroy saw no real justification for the French intrusion, so he immediately ordered Captain Domingo Ramón (the son of Diego Ramón) to make preparations to convert East Texas into a buffer zone by rebuilding the Spanish missions there. Assigned as second-in-command of this expedition was none other than St. Denis, who had adroitly persuaded the Spaniards that he now planned to set up steady on the Texas frontier and assist the Spanish in the work of Christianizing the Tejas. While room for distrus: existed between the Spanish viceroy and the Frenchman, both found mutual benefit in their alliance. The Spaniards hoped to take advantage of St. Denis's knowledge of the Texas terrain, his command of Indian languages, and his knack for befriending certain Indians nations, for developing friendly terms was essential for establishing a prosperous trade. According to some historians, however, St. Denis's subsequent marriage to Captain Diego Ramón's step-granddaughter at San Juan Bautista lay at the heart of his defection from the service of France.

**Settlements**

Such was the course of events in the early eighteenth century that placed the Spaniards permanently in Texas. In February 1716, Captain Domingo Ramón and St. Denis crossed the Rio Grande headed for East Texas at the head of about seventy-five people, among them twenty-six soldiers and several Franciscan priests (including Father Hidalgo). Upon the Europeans' arrival, the Tejas and other Caddos greeted them warmly (they regarded St. Denis as their friend, after all), and in late June the explorers set up base at a site close to the Neches River. They immediately constructed a temporary presidío, then four missions close by it, among them Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Nacogdoches, situated near present-day Nacogdoches. With the erection of the missions and presidío by the summer of 1716, the Spaniards had succeeded in accomplishing two objectives: revitalizing missionary work among the East Texas Indians,
which Father Hidalgo had sought; and laying claim to the region, the objective pursued by the Spanish government in order to ward off French encroachment.

But this was not the end of New Spain's Texas enterprise, for now New Spain's central government pushed ahead with plans to solidify the Spanish position on the northern periphery. At the beginning of 1717, Captain Ramón and Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús established two more missions farther east of the original foundations, inching the missionaries closer to the French post of Natchitoches. Another expedition, led by Martín de Alarcón, marched from Mexico City toward the Río San Antonio in 1718 to found a military post called San Antonio de Béjar and a mission they named San Antonio de Valero. The new presidio and mission would serve the purpose of Christianizing the Coahuiltecan Indians, who had long eked out a marginal existence in their ancestral territories and were presently under attack by marauding bands of Apaches coming down from the plains. Additionally, the presidio-mission complex midway between the Río Grande and the East Texas frontier line would become a supply station. The result was the peopling of what became the original municipality of San Antonio. Around this site the Spaniards constructed the Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo in 1720 and three others in the 1730s. In 1721, the Spaniards secured control of the Bay of Espíritu Santo (or La Bahía) by building a fort that they hoped would serve as a Gulf Coast deterrent to Frenchmen desiring to initiate sea trade west from Louisiana. They also reasoned that the garrison would temporarily store provisions to be brought into Texas from Vera Cruz by ship. In 1749, however, the Crown moved the presidio and mission (built in 1722) of La Bahía inland toward the San Antonio River at the site of modern-day Goliad (the site kept the name of La Bahía) as part of a plan to found two civilian communities there. The towns did not thrive, but the presidio-mission-settlement complex of La Bahía remained.

Despite the entrenchment, the French chased the Spaniards out of East Texas in 1719, when war broke out in Europe between Spain and France. In a countermove, the Spanish Crown dispatched the governor of the province of Coahuila and Tejas, the Marqués de Aguayo, to regain the lost East Texas lands. The governor discharged his assignment by restoring the old missions among the Tejas and establishing a new presidio in July 1721 named Nuestra Señora del Pilar de los Adaes, just fifteen miles west of Natchitoches, near the present-day town of Robeline, Louisiana. Returning to San Antonio in early 1722, Governor Aguayo issued directions for finishing the San Antonio de Béjar presidio started in 1718, then headed for La Bahía, where he established a mission to protect and Christianize the Karankawas and other coastal tribes. By the time Aguayo returned to his home in Coahuila in May 1722, he had increased the number of military posts and missions in Texas, repopulated the region with civilians, and established a much stronger Spanish hold on the entire province.

A new reconnoitering expedition in 1728 partly undermined Aguayo's work when it ascertained that the French were no longer the threat they once had been and concluded that a reduction in the number of Texas presidios, missions, and civilian settlements would make sense financially. But the friars
remained committed to working among the Indians; hence some of the missions continued functioning as before. Moreover, the imperial government still desired to reinforce the halfway station at San Antonio. A villa, or civilian settlement, called San Fernando de Béxar, was built there in 1731, when sixteen families (somewhere between fifty-five and fifty-nine individuals) arrived from the Canary Islands. In that same year, the friars from East Texas relocated to San Antonio. Therefore, before the end of the 1730s, a presidio, a municipality, and five missions constituted the San Antonio (or Béxar) complex.

The Spaniards also pushed to settle the country along the Rio Grande. Don José de Escandón took charge of this expedition, and by the early 1750s he had colonized the south bank of the river and also planted the seeds of modern-day Laredo, Texas. The lands of the lower Rio Grande Valley proved conducive to farming and ranching, and the region up to the Nueces River became pasture land for feral cattle and horses. The settling of this territory on both sides of the Rio Grande proved to be one of Spain’s most successful ventures in the Far North.

Church efforts to win converts also begot expansion, although attempts to broaden the mission system proved disappointing. In 1746, the Church established a mission (and the viceroy authorized the construction of a presidio in 1747) on the San Gabriel River (near present-day Rockdale, Texas) to assist the Tonkawas, who were then being victimized by the Apaches and Comanches, and it added two more missions in the vicinity in 1749. But the Crown never fully attended to these assignments. Demoralization among the presidial soldiers and even the missionaries set in, and the Indians became dissatisfied due to what they felt was a lack of proper attention. The project on the San Gabriel thus died in 1755.

An attempt to convert the dreaded Apaches also failed. Since the establishment of the San Antonio complex, these Indians had made periodic attacks on the settlements there, but by the 1740s their own hostilities with the Comanches had made the Apaches receptive to an alliance with the Spaniards. Seeing the opportunity to Christianize the Apaches finally present itself, the Spaniards in 1757 established a mission and fort along the San Sabá River (near modern-day Menard, Texas); prospects of finding silver deposits also encouraged the enterprise. It did not last long. A broad group of tribes allied against the Apaches (among them the Comanches) almost immediately attacked the new mission, and the Apaches showed indifference to the Spaniards’ proselytizing overtures. Following a series of futile attempts to carry out their missionary objectives, the viceroy ultimately abandoned the San Sabá enterprise in 1769.

Incorporation

What Spain sought by its efforts at settlement and missionization in Texas was the annexation of its far northern territory into the national core. Incorporation would involve transplanting the accoutrements of Spanish civilization to the frontier and ensuring the defense of the region from foreign threats by linking it to social and political systems in the interior of New Spain. Ties to the center of Spain’s New World empire would be established and maintained through the
presidio, the mission, the rancho, and the villa, for these institutions had been successful in the process of incorporating former frontier regions throughout New Spain. But as in all such efforts, settling the periphery of the empire entailed dealing with the indigenous peoples by either assimilating or annihilating them.

**Readings**

**Books**


