

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

BARTOLOME DE LAS CASAS, "OF THE ISLAND OF HISPANIOLA" (1542)

GOD has created all these numberless people to be quite the simplest, without malice or duplicity, most obedient, most faithful to their natural Lords, and to the Christians, whom they serve; the most humble, most patient, most peaceful and calm, without strife nor tumults; not wrangling, nor querulous, as free from uproar, hate and desire of revenge as any in the world . . . Among these gentle sheep, gifted by their Maker with the above qualities, the Spaniards entered as soon as they knew them, like wolves, tigers and lions which had been starving for many days, and since forty years they have done nothing else; nor do they afflict, torment, and destroy them with strange and new, and divers kinds of cruelty, never before seen, nor heard of, nor read of . . .

The Christians, with their horses and swords and lances, began to slaughter and practice strange cruelty among them. They penetrated into the country and spared neither children nor the aged, nor pregnant women, nor those in child labour, ~~all~~ of whom they ran through the body and lacerated, as though they were assaulting so many lambs herded in their sheepfold. They made bets as to who would slit a man in two, or cut off his head at one blow: or they opened up his bow-breast by the feet, and dashed their heads against the rocks. Others they seized by the shoulders and threw into the rivers, laughing and joking, and when they fell into the water they exclaimed: "boil body of so and so!" They

Source: Francis Augustus MacNutt, *Bartholomew de Las Casas: His Life, His Apostolate, and His Writings* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), p. 14.

THE SPANISH EMPIRE

In time, Spanish explorers in the New World stopped thinking of America simply as an obstacle to their search for a route to Asia and began instead to consider it a possible source of wealth in itself. The Spanish claimed for themselves the whole of the New

spitted the bodies of other babes, together with their mothers and all who were before them, on their swords.

They made a gallows just high enough for the feet to nearly touch the ground, and by thirteens, in honor and reverence of our Redeemer and the twelve Apostles, they put wood underneath and, with fire, they burned the Indians alive.

They wrapped the bodies of others entirely in dry straw, binding them in it and setting fire to it; and so they burned them. They cut off the hands of all they wished to take alive, made them carry them fastened on to them, and said: "Go and carry letters": that is; take the news to those who have fled to the mountains.

They generally killed the lords and nobles in the following way. They made wooden gridirons of stakes; bound them upon them, and made a slow fire beneath; thus the victims gave up the spirit by degrees, emitting cries of despair in their torture . . .

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

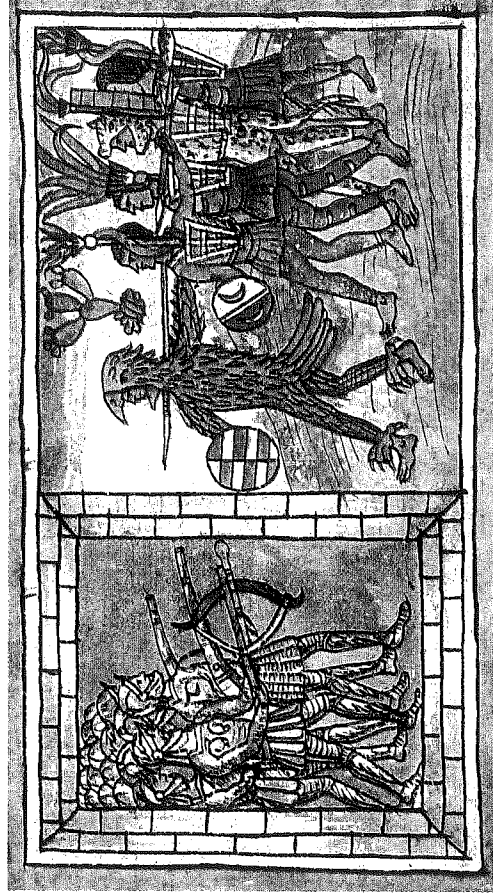
1. How did Bartolome de Las Casas characterize the natives? How do you think they would have responded to this description?
2. What metaphor did Las Casas use to describe the natives and where does this metaphor come from?
3. What role did Las Casas expect the Spaniards to play on Hispaniola? What did they do instead?

World, except for a *large part* of the east coast of South America (today's Brazil) that was reserved by a papal decree for the Portuguese.

In 1518, Hernando Cortés, who had been an unsuccessful Spanish government official in Cuba for fourteen years, led a small military expedition (about 600 men) against the Aztecs in Mexico and their powerful emperor, Montezuma, after hearing stories of great treasures there. His first assault on Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, failed. But Cortés and his army had unwittingly exposed the natives to smallpox, to which the natives, unlike the Europeans, had developed no immunity. The epidemic decimated the Aztec population and made it possible for the Spanish to triumph in their second attempt at conquest. Through his ruthless suppression of the surviving natives, Cortés established himself as one of the most brutal of the Spanish "conquistadores" (conquerors). Twenty years later, Francisco Pizarro conquered the Incas in Peru and opened the way for other Spanish advances into South America.

The first Spanish settlers in America were interested only in exploiting the American stores of gold and silver, and they were fabulously successful. For 300 years, beginning in the sixteenth century, the mines of Spanish America yielded more than ten times as much gold and silver as all the rest of the world's mines combined. Before long, however, most Spanish settlers in America traveled to the New World for other reasons. Many went in hopes of profiting from agriculture. They helped establish elements of European civilization permanently in America. Other Spaniards—priests, friars, and missionaries—went to America to spread the Christian religion; through their efforts, the influence of the Catholic Church ultimately extended throughout South and Central America and Mexico.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish Empire included the Caribbean islands, Mexico, and southern North America. It also spread into South America and included what is now Chile, Argentina, and Peru. In 1580, when the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies temporarily united, Brazil came under Spanish jurisdiction as well.



THE MEXICANS STRIKE BACK In this vivid scene from the Durán Codex, Mexican artists illustrate a rare moment in which Mexican warriors gained the upper hand over the Spanish invaders. Driven back by native fighters, the Spanish have taken refuge in a room in the royal palace in Tenochtitlán while brightly attired Mexican warriors besiege them. Although the Mexicans gained a temporary advantage in this battle, the drawing illustrates one of the reasons for their inability to withstand the Spanish in the longer term. The Spanish soldiers are armed with rifles and crossbows, while the Indians carry only spears and shields. (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Spain/Bridgeman Art Library)

NORTHERN OUTPOSTS

In 1565, the Spanish established the fort of St. Augustine in Florida, their first permanent settlement in what is now the United States. But it was little more than a small military outpost. A more substantial colonizing venture began in the Southwest in 1598, when Don Juan de Oñate traveled north from Mexico with a party of 500, claimed for Spain some of the lands of the Pueblo Indians in what is now New Mexico, and began to establish a colony. Oñate granted *encomiendas* (the right to exact tribute and labor from the natives on large tracts of land) to favored Spaniards. In 1609, Spanish colonists founded Santa Fe. By 1680, there were over 2,000 Spanish colonists living among about 30,000 Pueblos. The economic heart of the colony was cattle and sheep, raised on the *ranchos* that stretched out around the small towns Spanish settlers established.

Despite widespread conversions to Catholicism, most natives (including the converts) continued to practice their own religious rituals. In 1680, Spanish priests and the colonial government tried to suppress these rituals. In response, Pope, an Indian religious leader, led an uprising that killed hundreds of European settlers, captured Santa Fe, and drove the Spanish from the region. Twelve years later, the Spanish returned and crushed a last revolt in 1696.

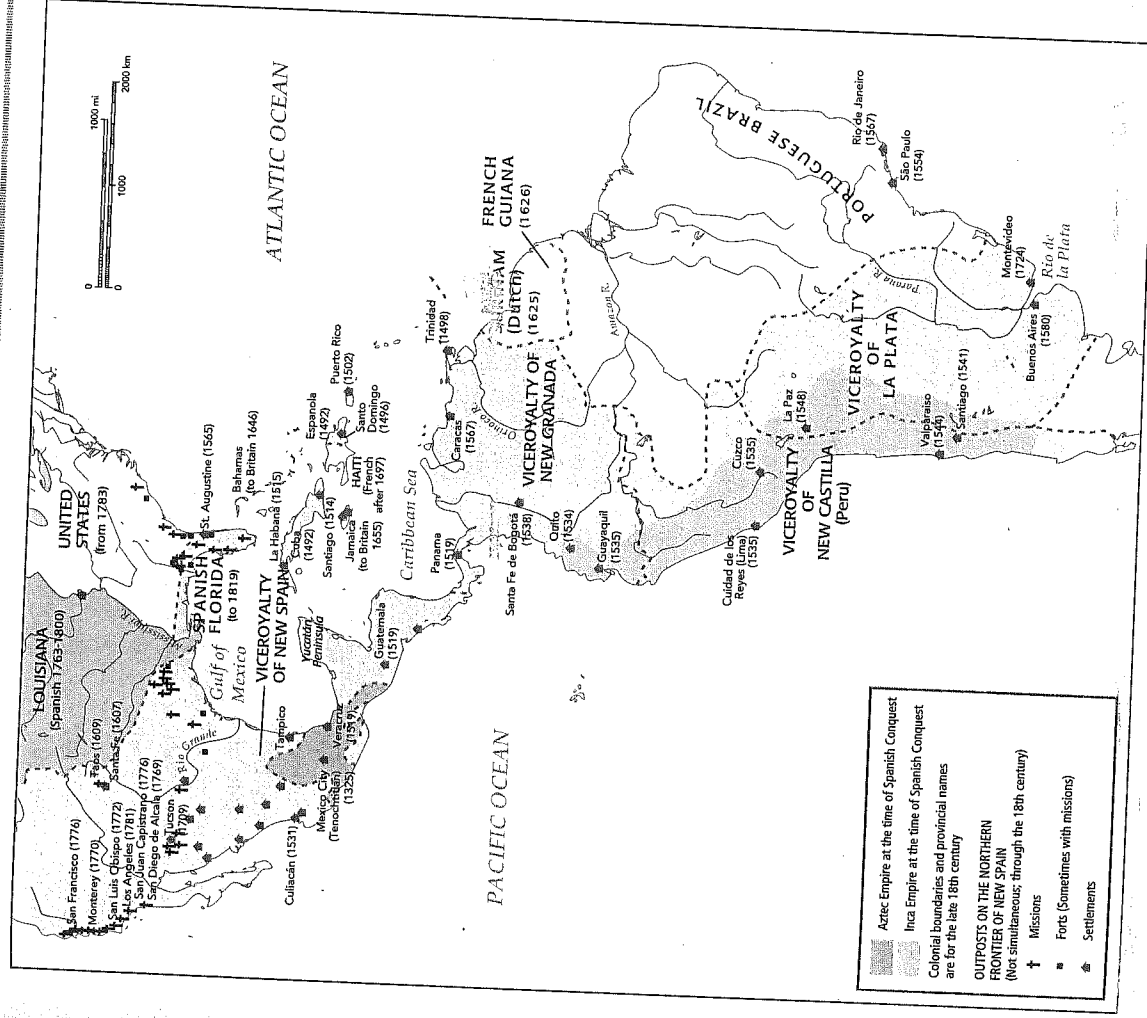
After the revolts, many Spanish colonists realized that they could not hope to prosper in New Mexico in constant conflict with a native population that greatly outnumbered them. Although the Spanish intensified their efforts to assimilate the Indians, they also now permitted the Pueblos to own land. They stopped commandeering Indian labor, and they tolerated the survival of tribal religious rituals. There was significant intermarriage between Europeans and Indians. By 1750, the Spanish population had grown to about 4,000. The Pueblo population had declined (through disease, war, and migration) to about 13,000—less than half what it had been in 1680. New Mexico had by then become a reasonably stable but still weak and isolated outpost of the Spanish Empire.

BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES

European and native cultures never entirely merged in the Spanish Empire. Nevertheless, the arrival of whites launched a process of interaction between different peoples that left no one unchanged.

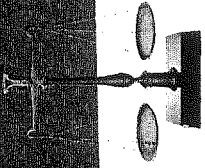
That Europeans were exploring the Americas at all was a result of early contacts with the natives, from whom they had learned of the rich deposits of gold and silver. From then on, the history of the Americas became one of increasing levels of exchanges—some beneficial, others catastrophic—among different peoples and cultures. The first and perhaps most profound result of this exchange was the importation of European diseases to the New World. It would be difficult to exaggerate the consequences of the exposure of Native Americans to such illnesses as influenza, measles, typhus, and above all smallpox. Millions died. In some areas, native populations were virtually wiped out within a few decades of their first contact with whites. On Hispaniola, where Columbus had landed in the 1490s, the native population quickly declined from approximately 1 million to about 500. In the Maya area of Mexico, as much as 95 percent of the population perished within a few years of the natives' first contact with the Spanish. Many (although not all) of the tribes north of Mexico were spared the worst of the epidemics. But for

THE COLLISION OF CULTURES • 13



SPANISH AMERICA From the time of Columbus's initial voyage in 1492 until the mid-nineteenth century, Spain was the dominant colonial power in the New World. From the southern regions of South America to the northern regions of the Pacific Northwest, Spain controlled one of the world's vastest empires. Note how much of the Spanish Empire was simply grafted upon the earlier empires of native peoples—the Incas in what is today Chile and Peru and the Aztecs across much of the rest of South America, Mexico, and the Southwest of what is now the United States. • *What characteristics of Spanish colonization would account for their preference for already settled regions?*

other areas of the New World, this was a catastrophe at least as grave as, and in some places far worse than, the Black Death that had killed over one-third of the population of Europe two centuries before. Some Europeans, watching this biological catastrophe, saw it as evidence of God's will that they should dominate the New World—and its native population.



THE AMERICAN POPULATION BEFORE COLUMBUS

NO one knows how many people lived in the Americas in the centuries before Columbus. But scholars, and others, have spent more than a century debating the question. Interest in this question survives because the debate over the pre-Columbian population is closely connected to the much larger debate over the consequences of European settlement of the Western Hemisphere.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Native Americans spoke often of the great days before Columbus when there were many more people in their tribes. The painter and ethnographer George Catlin, who spent much time among the tribes in the 1830s, listened to these oral legends and estimated that there had been 16 million Indians in North America before the Europeans came. Other white Americans dismissed such claims as preposterous, insisting that Indian civilization was far too primitive ever to have sustained a population even as large as a million.

In 1928, James Mooney, an ethnologist at the Smithsonian Institution, drawing from early accounts of soldiers and missionaries in the sixteenth century, came up with the implausibly precise figure of 1.15 million natives who lived north of Mexico in the early sixteenth century. That was a larger figure than nineteenth-century writers had suggested, but still much smaller than the Indians themselves claimed. A few years later, the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber used some of Mooney's methods to come up with an estimate considerably larger than Mooney's but much lower than Catlin's. He concluded in 1934 that there were 8.4 million people in the Americas in 1492, half in North America and half in the Caribbean and South America.

These low early estimates reflected an assumption that the arrival of the Europeans did not greatly reduce the native population. But in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars discovered that the early tribes had been catastrophically decimated by European

The decimation of native populations in the southern regions of the Americas was not only a result of exposure to infection. It was also a result of the conquistadores's deliberate policy of subjugation and extermination. Their brutality was in part a reflection of the ruthlessness with which Europeans waged war in all parts of the world. It was also a result of their conviction that the natives were "savages"—uncivilized peoples who could be treated as somehow not fully human. By the 1540s, the combined effects of European diseases and European military brutality had all but destroyed the empires of Mexico and South America.

Not all aspects of the exchange were disastrous to the Indians. The Europeans introduced to the natives important new crops (among them sugar and bananas), domestic livestock (cattle, pigs, and sheep), and, perhaps most significant, the horse, which gradually became central to the lives of many natives and transformed their societies.

plagues not long after the arrival of Columbus—that the numbers Europeans observed even in the late 1500s were already dramatically smaller than the numbers in 1492. Historians such as William McNeill in 1976 and Alfred Crosby a decade later produced powerful accounts of the near extinction of some tribes and the dramatic depopulation of others in a pestilential holocaust with few parallels in history.

The belief that the native population was much larger in 1492 than it was a few decades later has helped spur much larger estimates of how many people were in America before Columbus. Henry Dobyns, an anthropologist, claimed in 1966 that there were between 10 and 12 million people north of Mexico in 1492 and between 90 and 112 million in all of the Americas. No subsequent scholar has made so high a claim, but most subsequent estimates have been much closer to Dobyns's than to Kroeber's. The geographer William M. Denevan, for example, argued in 1976 that the American population in 1492 was around 55 million and that the population north of Mexico was under 4 million. These are among the lowest of modern estimates, but still dramatically higher than the nineteenth-century numbers.

The vehemence with which scholars, and at times the larger public, have debated these figures does not stem solely from the inherent difficulty of determining population size. It is also because the debate over



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the population is part of the debate over whether the arrival of Columbus—and the millions of Europeans who followed him—was a great advance in the history of civilization or an unparalleled catastrophe that virtually exterminated a large and flourishing native population. How to balance the many achievements of European civilization in the New World after 1492 against the terrible destruction of native peoples that accompanied it is, in the end, less a historical question, perhaps, than a moral one. ●

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. What are some of the difficulties in trying to determine the size of the pre-Columbian population?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using oral history as a source of information about the past?

The exchange was at least as important (and more beneficial) to the Europeans. In both North and South America, the arriving white peoples learned from the natives new agricultural techniques appropriate to the demands of the new land. They discovered new crops—above all maize (corn), which Columbus took back to Europe from his first trip to America. Such foods as squash, pumpkins, beans, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes all found their way into European diets.

In South America, Central America, and Mexico, Europeans and natives lived in intimate, if unequal, contact with one another. Many natives gradually came to speak Spanish or Portuguese, but they created a range of dialects fusing the European languages with elements of their own. European men outnumbered European women by at least ten to one. Intermarriage—often forcible—became frequent between Spanish immigrants and native women. Before long, the population of the colonies came to be dominated (numerically, at least) by people of mixed race, or *mestizo*.

THE ATLANTIC CONTEXT OF EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY

MOST Americans understand that our nation has recently become intimately bound up with the rest of the world—that we live in what some call the “age of globalization.” Until recently, however, most historians have examined the nation’s past in relative isolation. Among the first areas of American history to be reexamined in an international perspective is the earliest period of European settlement of the Americas. Many scholars of early American history now examine what happened in the “New World” in the context of what has become known as the “Atlantic World.”

The idea of an Atlantic World rests in part on the obvious connections between western Europe and the Spanish, British, French, and Dutch colonies in North and South America. All the early European civilizations of the Americas were part of a great imperial project launched by the major powers of Europe. The massive European and African immigrations to the Americas beginning in the sixteenth century, the defeat and devastation of native populations, the creation of European agricultural and urban settlements, and the imposition of imperial regulations on trade, commerce, landowning, and political life—all of these forces reveal the influence of Old World imperialism on the history of the New World.

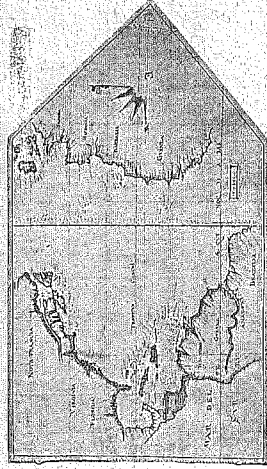
But the expansion of empires is only one part of the creation of the Atlantic World. At least equally important—and closely related—is the expansion of commerce from Europe and Africa to the Americas. Although some Europeans traveled to the New World in search of religious freedom, or to escape oppression, or to search for adventure, the great majority of European immigrants were in search of economic opportunity. Not surprisingly, therefore, the European settlements in the Americas were almost from the start intimately connected to Europe through the growth of commerce between them—commerce that grew more extensive and more complex with every passing year. The commercial relationship between America and Europe was responsible not just for the growth of trade, but also for the increases in migration over time—as the demand for labor in the New World drew more and more settlers from the Old World. Commerce was also the principal reason for the rise of slavery in the Americas, and for the growth of the slave trade between European America and Africa. The Atlantic World, in other words, included not just Europe and the Americas, but Africa as well.

Religion was another force binding together the Atlantic World. The vast majority of people of European descent were

Virtually all the enterprises of the Spanish and Portuguese colonists depended on Indian workforces. In some places, Indians were sold into slavery. More often, colonists used a coercive (or “indentured”) wage system, under which Indians worked in the mines and on the plantations under duress for fixed periods. That was not, in the end, enough to meet the labor needs of the colonists. As early as 1502, European settlers began importing slaves from Africa.

Christians, and most of them maintained important religious ties to part of a hierarchical church based in Rome with close ties with the Vatican. But the Protestant faiths that predominated in North America were intimately linked to their European counterparts as well. New religious ideas and movements spread back and forth across the Atlantic with astonishing speed. Great revivals that began in Europe moved quickly to America. The “Great Awakening” of the mid-eighteenth century, for example, began in Britain and traveled to America in large part through the efforts of the English evangelist George Whitefield. American evangelists later carried religious ideas from the New World back to the Old.

The early history of European America was also closely bound up with the intellectual life of Europe. The Enlightenment—the cluster of ideas that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasizing the power of human reason—moved quickly to the Americas, producing intellectual ferment throughout the New World, but particularly in the British colonies in North America and the Caribbean. The ideas of the British philosopher John Locke, for example, helped shape the founding of Georgia. The English Constitution, and the idea of the “rights of Englishmen,” shaped the way North Americans developed their own concepts of politics. Many of the ideas that underlaid the American Revolution were products of British and continental philosophy that had traveled across the Atlantic. The reinterpretation of those ideas by Americans to help justify their drive to independence—by, among others, Thomas Paine—moved back to Europe and helped, among other things, to inspire the French Revolution. Scientific and technological knowledge—another product of the



(The I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection of American Historical Prints, Prints Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

Enlightenment—traveled constantly across the Atlantic and back. Americans borrowed industrial technology from Britain. Europe acquired much of its early knowledge of electricity from experiments done in America. But the Enlightenment was only one part of the continuing intellectual connections within the Atlantic World, connections that spread artistic, scholarly, and political ideas widely through the lands bordering the ocean.

Instead of thinking of the early history of what became the United States simply as the story of the growth of thirteen small colonies along the Atlantic seaboard of North America, the idea of the “Atlantic World” encourages us to think of early American history as a vast pattern of exchanges and interactions—trade, migration, religious and intellectual exchange, and many other relationships—among all the societies bordering the Atlantic: western Europe, western Africa, the Caribbean, and North and South America. •

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. What is the Atlantic World?
2. What has led historians to begin studying the idea of an Atlantic World?

AFRICA AND AMERICA

Over one-half of all the immigrants to the New World between 1500 and 1800 were Africans, virtually all of them sent to the Americas against their will. Most came from a large region below the Sahara Desert, known as Guinea.

Europeans and white Americans came to portray African society as primitive and uncivilized. But most Africans were, in fact, highly civilized peoples with well-developed economies and political systems. The residents of upper Guinea had substantial commercial contact with the Mediterranean world—trading ivory, gold, and slaves for finished goods—and, largely as a result, became early converts to Islam. After the collapse of the ancient kingdom of Ghana around A.D. 1100, they created the even larger empire of Mali, whose trading center at Timbuktu became fabled as a center of education and a meeting place of the peoples of many lands.

Farther south, Africans were more isolated from Europe and the Mediterranean and were more politically fragmented. The central social unit was the village, which usually consisted of members of an extended family group. Some groups of villages united in small kingdoms. But no large empires emerged in the south. Nevertheless, these southern societies developed extensive trade, both among themselves and, to a lesser degree, with the outside world.

African civilizations developed economies that reflected the climates and resources of their lands. In upper Guinea, fishing and rice cultivation, supplemented by the extensive trade with Mediterranean lands, were the foundation of the economy. Farther south, Africans grew wheat and other food crops, raised livestock, and fished. There were some more nomadic tribes in the interior, who subsisted largely on hunting and gathering. But most Africans were sedentary, farming people.

As in many Indian societies in America, African families tended to be matrilineal: they traced their heredity through and inherited property from their mothers. Women played a major role, often the dominant role, in trade. In many areas, they were the principal farmers (while the men hunted, fished, and raised livestock), and everywhere, they managed child care and food preparation. Most tribes also divided political power by gender, with men choosing leaders to manage male affairs and women choosing parallel leaders to handle female matters.

Small elites of priests and nobles stood at the top of many African societies. Most people belonged to a ~~large~~ middle group of farmers, traders, crafts workers, and others. At the bottom of society were slaves—men and women, not all of them African, who were put into bondage after being captured in wars, because of criminal behavior, or as a result of unpaid debts. Slaves in Africa were generally in bondage for a fixed term, and in the meantime they retained certain legal protections (including the right to marry). Children did not inherit their parents' condition of bondage.

The African slave trade long preceded European settlement in the New World. As early as the eighth century, west Africans began selling small numbers of slaves to traders from the Mediterranean and later to the Portuguese. In the sixteenth century, however, the market for slaves increased dramatically as a result of the growing European demand for sugarcane. The small areas of sugar cultivation in the Mediterranean could not meet the demand, and production soon spread to new areas: to the island of Madeira off the African coast, which became a Portuguese colony, and not long thereafter (still in the sixteenth century) to the Caribbean islands and Brazil. Sugar was a labor-intensive crop, and the demand for African workers in these new areas of cultivation was high. At first the slave traders were overwhelmingly Portuguese. By the seventeenth century, the Dutch had won control of most of the market. In the eighteenth century, the English dominated it. (Despite some recent claims, Jews were never significantly involved in the slave trade.) By 1700, slavery had spread well beyond its original locations in the Caribbean and South America and into the English colonies to the north.