

From an imposing capital city in a high Andean valley far to the south, the even larger Inca Empire had grown just as rapidly and recently as had the Aztec Empire. The Inca capital was called Cuzco, meaning "the navel of the universe." Today one speaks of "the Incas," but the name Inca actually referred only to the emperor and his empire. Ethnically, the people of Cuzco were Quechua speakers, and they, too, drew on a long history of previous cultural evolution in the Andes. Cuzco's architectural marvels—earthquake-resistant masonry walls with interlocking stones—were an old trick among Andean builders. Heirs to ancient civilizations, the Aztec and Inca Empires were newer and more fragile than they appeared. The Mayas were less imperially inclined. Beginning much earlier than Tenochtitlan and Cuzco, various Maya city-states with imposing ceremonial centers held sway in Central America: Tikal, Copán, Tulum, Uxmal. In cultural attainments, such as art, architecture, and astronomy, the Mayas were second to none in America. But the Mayas did not create an empire to rival the Inca or Aztec empires. And since the high point of the Maya Empire, if such a term really applies, was many centuries before the Europeans arrived, it plays little part in our story.

At the moment of the Encounter, then, most of Latin America was inhabited by nonsedentary or semisedentary people, such as the Pampas of Argentina or the Tupis of Brazil. Today, few of their descendants remain. Instead, the large indigenous populations of Latin America descend from the sedentary farmers, many of whom lived under Aztec, Maya, or Inca rule until the Europeans arrived. Why did they survive when the others perished? The answer is complex, but it explains much about Latin America. It requires, first, some background about Spain and Portugal, joined under the geographical name *Iberia*.

ORIGINS OF A CRUSADING MENTALITY

In the 1490s, when Europeans clambered out of their cramped sailing vessels to face indigenous Americans for the first time, the greatest question was how each would react to the other. This was truly a cultural encounter, a clash of values and attitudes. The Spanish and Portuguese outlook, along with their crusader rhetoric, had been shaped by the history of the Iberian Peninsula.

Iberia is a rugged, mountainous land. Parts of it are as green as Ireland (very green, indeed), but most of it is dry. On pictures taken from space, southern Spain appears the same color as nearby northern Africa. Historically, Iberia had been a bridge between Europe and Africa, and the narrow straits of Gibraltar separating the two continents had often been crossed, in both directions, by migrants and invaders. In the year 711, Muslims from northern Africa, called Moors, began to cross heading north and seized most of the peninsula from its Christian kings (whose predecessors, generations earlier, had taken it from the Romans, who, in turn, had seized it from the Carthaginians, and so on). For most of the next eight hundred years, Iberia contained multiethnic societies that intermingled but also fought one another. Both activities left their mark.

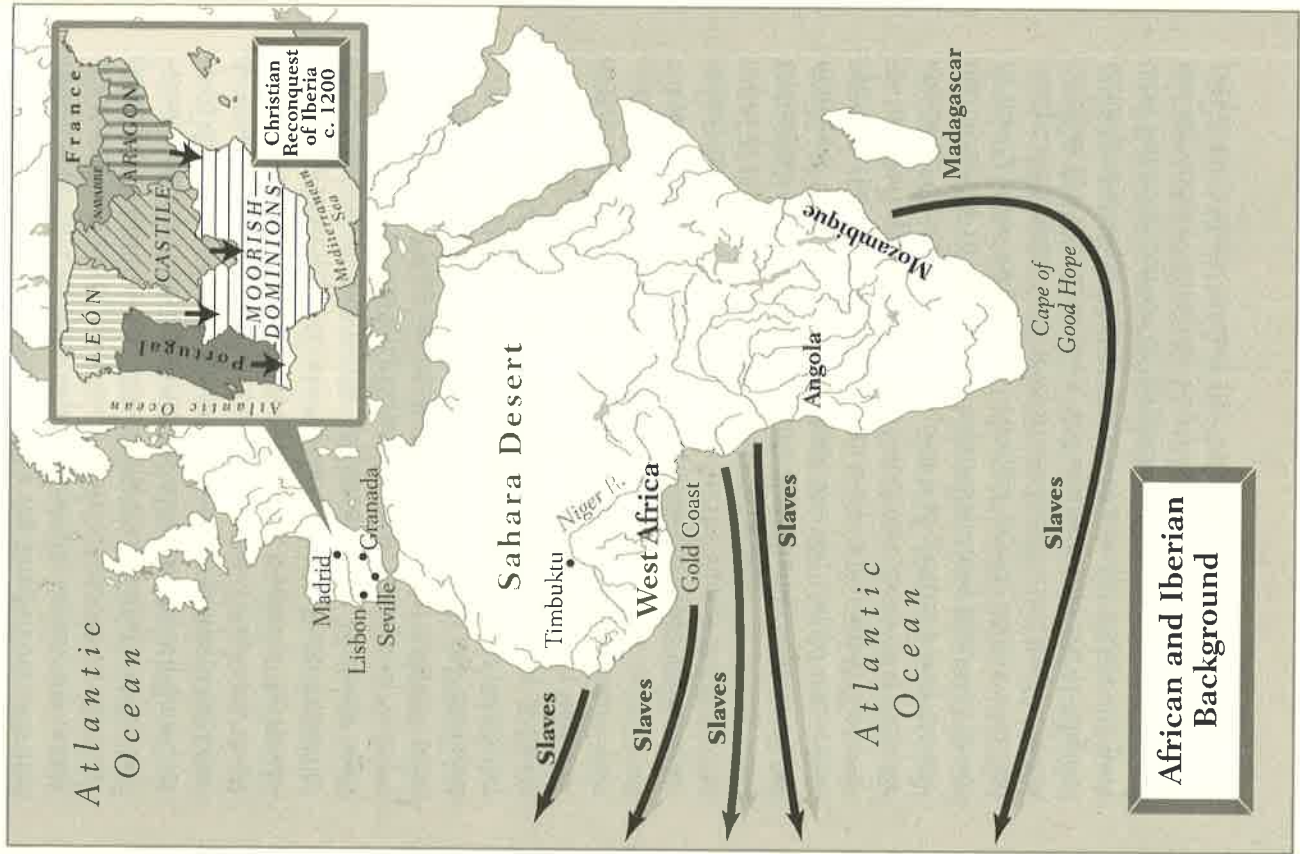
Along with the practical skills of the Islamic world, the Moors brought with them the learning of the Greeks and Romans, better preserved in the Middle East during Europe's Dark Ages. Christians who lived under Moorish rule or who traded with Moorish neighbors from the remaining Christian kingdoms learned a healthy respect for the cultural achievements of Islam. The Moors were better physicians, better engineers, and better farmers than the Iberian Christians, whose languages gradually filled with Arabic words for new crops (such as basil, artichokes, and almonds), new processes and substances (such as distillation and alcohol), new furnishings (such as carpeting), and new

sciences (such as algebra and chemistry)—eventually totaling about a quarter of all modern Spanish and Portuguese words. Although speakers of Arabic, the Moors were darker than Arabs. Shakespeare's "black" character Othello, for example, is a Moor. So the Christians of Iberia had long exposure to a sophisticated and powerful people who did not look European. In addition, on the eve of the Encounter, Iberia had one of the largest Jewish minorities in Europe, and Lisbon and Seville were already home to thousands of enslaved Africans. Not sympathetic to cultural and racial difference, the Iberians were nevertheless well acquainted with it. Spanish and Portuguese attitudes toward other people ranged from scorn to grudging admiration to sexual curiosity—dusky Moorish maidens figure erotically in Iberian folktales. The reign of Alfonso the Wise (1252–84), a noted lawgiver, represents a high point in this tense, multicultural Iberian world. In the end, however, the peninsula's eight hundred years of multicultural experience dissolved in an intolerant drive for religious purity.

The Christian reconquest of Iberia powerfully shaped the institutions and mentality of the Spanish and Portuguese. Iberian Christians believed that they had found the tomb of Santiago, Saint James the Apostle, in the remote northwestern corner of the peninsula never conquered by the Moors. The Moor-slaying Santiago, pictured as a sword-swinging knight, became the patron saint of reconquest, and his tomb in Santiago de Compostela became Europe's greatest shrine. Reconquest brought the repeated challenges of annexing new territory and subjugating infidel populations. As they pushed the Moors south toward Africa over thirty generations, the reconquering Christians founded new urban centers as bastions of their advancing territorial claims, and individual warlords took responsibility for Christianizing groups of defeated Moors, receiving tribute and service from them in return. The same challenges and the same procedures would be repeated in America. Another effect

of the reconquest was to perpetuate the knightly renown and influence of the Christian nobility. For this reason, the values of the nobles (fighting prowess, leisure, display of wealth) lost ground only slowly to the values of the commercial middle class (moneymaking, industry, thrift). In addition, the requirements of warfare led to a concentration of political power to facilitate decisive, unified command. Two of the peninsula's many small Christian kingdoms gradually emerged as leaders of the reconquest. The most important by far was centrally located Castile, whose dominions eventually engulfed much of Iberia and, when united with the kingdoms of Aragon, León, and Navarre, laid the political basis for modern Spain. On the Atlantic coast, the king of Portugal led a parallel advance south and managed to maintain independence from Spain. Portugal was the first to complete its reconquest, reaching the southern coast of Iberia in the mid-1200s. On the Spanish side, the Moorish kingdom of Granada held out for two more centuries before finally succumbing to Castilian military power in 1492.

When Queen Isabel of Castile decided to bankroll the explorations of Christopher Columbus in the 1490s, she did so in hopes of enriching her kingdom, true enough. By sailing west, Columbus proposed to outflank a profitable Venetian-Arab monopoly on trade routes to Asia. But we should not underestimate the religious mystique that also surrounded the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs. Isabel was above all a Catholic monarch. Centuries of reconquest had created a true crusading mentality in Iberia, and the monarchies used this fervor to justify their increasingly absolute power. Moors who had accepted Christian rule, Jews whose families had lived in Iberia for close to a thousand years, and anyone suspected of religious infidelity found themselves objects of a purge. Moors and Jews were forced to convert or emigrate. In fact, in the very year of the surrender of Granada, Isabel expelled tens of thousands of people from Spain because they refused to renounce the Jewish



faith. And Moors and Jews who did convert remained subject to discrimination as "New Christians." The famous Spanish Inquisition was established to impose religious purity.

During the 1500s, Catholics and Protestants began fighting bitterly in western Europe, and the monarchs of a unified Spain led the Catholic side, pouring prodigious resources into the war effort. Recall that in 1588 the Spanish Armada attempted to invade Protestant England. Overseas exploration also took on religious significance. The earlier Christian reconquest in Portugal allowed the Portuguese to extend their crusading activities into Africa ahead of Spain. As Portuguese ships edged down the coast of Africa during the 1400s, bringing back gold and slaves, they found religious justification in tales of a lost Christian kingdom that supposedly lay beyond the Sahara, waiting to be reunited with the rest of Christendom. Isabel's decision to fund the voyages of Columbus was Spain's bid to catch up with Portugal. Thus, the two Iberian monarchies, strengthened politically by the reconquest, became the first in Europe to sponsor major overseas exploration, and they arrived in the Western Hemisphere neck and neck.

Although the Spanish-sponsored expedition of Columbus arrived in America first, the difference was less than a decade. Let us start with the Portuguese, who had pioneered the navigational skills and naval technology needed to get there. The Portuguese colonization of Brazil exemplifies what happened when the Europeans encountered indigenous people who were not fully sedentary. An initial look at Brazil will help us appreciate the unique qualities of the very different, and far more famous, encounter of the Spanish with the fully sedentary peoples of indigenous Mexico and Peru.

THE BRAZILIAN COUNTEREXAMPLE

The first Portuguese fleet arrived in Brazil in 1500. Like Columbus a few years earlier, the Portuguese commander Pedro Álvares Cabral was bound for India, but in contrast to Columbus, he actually did get there. Cabral had no intention of sailing around the world. Instead, he was sailing from Portugal down the west coast of Africa and around its southern tip into the Indian Ocean. To catch the best winds, he had swung far out into the South Atlantic on his southward voyage—so far out, in fact, that before turning back east he bumped into Brazil. Like Columbus, Cabral did not know exactly what he had found, but he knew that it was not India. After naming Brazil the "Island of the True Cross," Cabral hurried on to his original destination.

Brazil seemed unimportant to the Portuguese at the time. Just a few years earlier, they had succeeded in establishing a practical route to the fabled riches of South Asia—which Columbus had failed to do. For the rest of the 1500s, the Portuguese concentrated on exploiting their early advantage in the Far Eastern trade. Portuguese outposts elsewhere reached from Africa to Arabia, India, Indonesia, China, and Japan. Portuguese ships returned to Europe perilously overloaded with silks and porcelain, precious spices (pepper, nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon), and Persian horses, not to mention gold and silver. Monopoly access to these riches made Portugal, for a time, a major player in world history. Brazil offered nothing comparable to India in the eyes of Cabral or his chronicler, Pero Vaz de Caminha. Caminha's curious description of what he saw on Brazilian shores presented a vision of a new Garden of Eden, paying particular attention to the fact that the indigenous people there wore no clothes: "They go around naked, without any covering at all. They worry no more about showing their private parts than their faces." The Portuguese sailors plainly

found indigenous women attractive and inviting, but the only thing that seemed to have potential for sale in Europe was a red dye made from the "brazilwood" tree.

The name of this export product quickly replaced the original name of "Island of the True Cross," just as economics upstaged religion, overall, in the colonization of Brazil and Spanish America. Still, religious ideas must not be discounted. "Fathers, pray that God make me chaste and zealous enough to expand our Faith throughout the world," implored the young Portuguese prince Sebastian, with unquestionable sincerity, to his Jesuit tutors. Europeans of the 1500s believed in the teachings of their religion as a matter of course, and some Portuguese and Spanish men, especially those in holy orders such as the Jesuits, undertook quite perilous voyages around the world primarily to save souls. In sum, however, the vast majority of people had a mundane mix of motivations, and the lure of worldly success was constantly evident in their actions. The idea of spreading Christianity provided, above all, a compelling rationale for laying claim to huge chunks of the "undiscovered" world. Consequently, religious ideas became particularly influential at the level of formal rationalization. Whenever the invaders of America had to explain and justify their actions, they invoked religious goals for reasons no more sinister than the common human wish to present oneself in the best light.

Aside from their immortal souls, forest dwellers like the Tupi did not have very much that the Europeans wanted, so they were left more or less alone at first. Along the Brazilian coast, some mutually advantageous trade developed when Tupi men were willing to fell the brazilwood and float the logs to trading stations in return for useful items such as steel axes. Occasionally, Portuguese castaways or exiles "went native," to live among the indigenous people, and found a different kind of worldly success, becoming influential figures in their localities and, in a manner foreshadowed by the chronicle of Pero Vaz de Caminha,

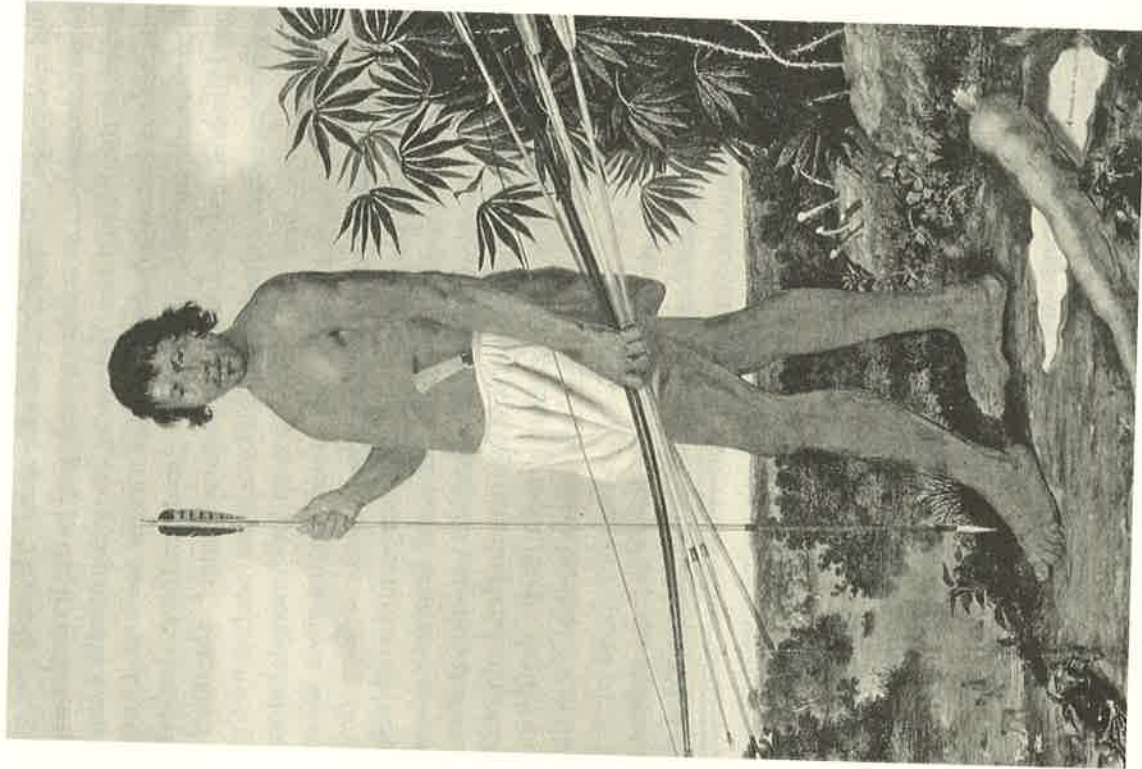
fathering dozens and dozens of children—the beginnings of a process of racial mixing that has characterized the history of Brazil. The king of Portugal was too preoccupied with his Asian empire to think much about Brazil until the 1530s, when the appearance of French ships along the Brazilian coast made him fear for his claims there. To secure them, he finally sent Portuguese settlers to Brazil. Suddenly, the Portuguese did want something that the Tupi possessed—their land. Now everything would change.

To the Portuguese, settling the land meant clearing the forest and planting crops, and sugarcane was the only crop with major export potential. It could be milled and boiled down into concentrated, imperishable blocks packed in wooden chests that fit easily into the small sailing ships of the day, and it brought a high price in Europe, where sugarcane did not grow. These qualities made sugarcane the cash crop of choice for centuries, first in Brazil and later in the Caribbean and throughout the lowlands of tropical America—anywhere landowners measured their success according to what they could buy in Europe. And that was more or less everywhere in the Iberian colonies. Sugar was a plantation crop, requiring plenty of capital investment and a large labor force, a crop where the profits of the planter were partly a function of cheap labor. But no Portuguese settlers wanted to provide cheap agricultural labor. Indeed, Iberians in America were typically loathe to do any manual work at all, because it contradicted their model of worldly success. As for Tupi men, they traditionally hunted and fished and regarded farming as women's work. Why should indigenous men or women hoe weeds and chop cane for meager wages under the burning sun when the forest gave them everything they wanted? In any event, their semisedentary way of life involved periodic movement incompatible with the plantation's need for a fixed labor force.

To gain the land and the labor of forest people like the Tupi, the Portuguese resorted to force of arms. This meant attacking

and enslaving each tribal group of a few hundred, one by one, in bloody skirmishes, an activity quite taxing to the limited manpower of the Portuguese. Here were no decisive battles that put large defeated populations at the victors' disposal. Other factors made the task even harder. American forest dwellers used the bow and the blowgun with deadly effect. The invaders' horses—elsewhere something like a secret weapon for the Europeans, because they did not exist in America before the Encounter—could hardly move amid hanging vines, fallen trunks, and tangled roots. To those who know it, the forest provides countless opportunities to hide, to escape, and to ambush pursuers. Even after they were defeated, native Brazilians would melt into the limitless woodland beyond the plantations if not supervised constantly. In other words, extracting land and labor from semisedentary forest dwellers meant totally destroying their society and enslaving them. Most were likely to die in the process.

This is exactly what happened all along the coast of Brazil once the Portuguese began to establish sugar plantations. The king of Portugal, who viewed the indigenous people as potentially loyal subjects, did not approve of this wholesale annihilation, but his power in Brazil was surprisingly limited. In an attempt to settle two thousand miles of coastline on the cheap, the king had parceled out enormous slices to wealthy individuals, called captains, who promised to colonize and rule in his name. Significantly, the most successful were those who minimized conflict with the indigenous people. Pernambuco, on the very northeastern tip of Brazil, became the model sugar captaincy, partly because the family of its captain established an alliance by marriage with a local chief. Most of the captaincies failed, however. By the mid-1540s, indigenous rebellions threatened to erupt up and down the coast. On the splendid Bay of All Saints, the Tupinambá, a subgroup of the Tupi, had demolished one of the most promising settlements. So, in 1548, the Portuguese king stepped up the colonization of Brazil by



A TUPINAMBÁ WARRIOR. The warrior in this 1643 painting belonged to a subgroup of the Tupi, among the most widespread of the many semisedentary indigenous people in what is today Brazil. *The Granger Collection, New York.*

appointing a royal governor and building a capital city, Salvador (also called Bahia), on that site.

Over the next half century, between the planters' efforts to enslave the Tupinambá people and certain disastrous efforts to protect them, the Tupinambá vanished from the area of the sugar plantations. Particularly lethal were European diseases, against which indigenous people had no natural resistance; contagion ran rampant among Tupinambá slaves in the close quarters of plantations. Any gathering of native populations facilitated this "demographic catastrophe." The same ship that brought the first royal governor also brought the first black-robed Jesuit missionaries to Brazil. Famous for their intelligence and zeal, the Jesuits moved quickly to establish special villages where they gathered their indigenous flock to teach them Christianity and defend them from enslavement. Despite all good intentions, however, epidemic European diseases decimated the indigenous inhabitants of the Jesuit villages. On the plantations, too, indigenous slaves were fast disappearing because of disease and despair. To replace them, the Portuguese bought slaves in Africa and crowded them into the holds of Brazilian-bound ships. By 1600, Africans were rapidly replacing indigenous people as the enslaved workforce of Brazilian sugar plantations. The surviving Tupinambá either fled into the interior or intermarried and gradually disappeared as a distinct group. This pattern was to be repeated throughout Brazil as sugar cultivation spread.

AFRICA AND THE SLAVE TRADE

In several parts of Latin America, Africans totally replaced indigenous laborers in the 1600s. How were so many people enslaved and taken out of Africa? Why did they survive to populate Brazil and the Caribbean while people like the Tupi died? Now that Africans have entered our story—never to leave it—we should consider the part they played in the Encounter.