To the Spaniards, America was a New World. They did not know what they would find here. In Mexico, they found gold and other treasures. The Spaniards hoped that they would find much gold in New Mexico, too. But they did not find any. New Mexico was a poor place. Poor or not, however, the Pueblo people loved it. They were ready to fight to keep their land. They did not want the Spaniards to take their land.

After Columbus’s first trip to America, Spaniards settled in the Caribbean Islands. They built towns and cities. They farmed and mined for gold. And they looked north and west to the mainland of North America. They hoped to conquer the mainland and find riches.
The Conquest of Mexico

In 1519 Hernando Cortés sailed west from Cuba with an army. He landed on the coast of Mexico. With his men, he marched through high mountains. At last they came to a wide valley.

In the center of this valley was a grand and beautiful city. It was the capital of the Aztec Indian Empire. The city had thousands of people. It was larger than any city in Spain. The Spaniards could hardly believe their eyes. How could there be such a beautiful city, unknown to them?

The Aztec Emperor was named Montezuma. He greeted Cortés as a friend. For a while, the Spaniards and Aztecs got along. But the Indians had much gold and other treasure. Finally, the Spaniards seized the gold. War broke out and Montezuma was killed. The great Aztec city was destroyed.

On the ruins of the Indian buildings, Cortés began a new city. It became the Spanish capital. He named it Mexico City. In their own language, the Aztecs called themselves Mexica. Cortés changed that word to Mexico when he named the capital.

Mexico City became the center of government for a large Spanish colony. The colony was known as New Spain. It included all of modern Mexico and much of Central America. It also included a large part of what is now the western United States.
The Northern Mystery

Soon, other Spaniards left Mexico City to explore. They hoped to find another Mexico—a new Mexico. That is, they were looking for another Indian empire like the one conquered by Cortés. Perhaps, hidden in the wilderness, was a new Mexico rich with gold.

In the late 1520s Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca was shipwrecked on the Texas coast. With three others, he wandered lost for seven years. Two of these men were Spaniards. The other was a black slave named Estevanico.

After much suffering, the men reached the first settlements in New Spain. They had many stories to tell. They were the first Europeans to see new lands in the far north.

People in Mexico City listened to these stories. They got excited. They thought Cabeza de Vaca had just missed finding treasure. Somewhere beyond the lands he visited must be the new Mexico.

Now, everyone believed that gold was in the far north. But where? That was the great mystery. For many years, the Spaniards tried to solve the “northern mystery.” They tried to find the gold they believed was there.
Exploration Routes of Coronado (1540–1542) and Oñate (1598)
Estevanico left on the Sunday before Easter, after dinner. Some days later...
Estevanico sent messengers back to me. They told me that I should follow after him, for he had found information of a very mighty province. One of the messengers said that Estevanico was in a town [that was] thirty days’ journey from this province. The first city in the province was called Cíbola. He said also that there were seven great cities, all under one ruler. The houses of these cities are said to be made of lime and stone, and are very great. . . .

—Adapted from Hakluyt’s Collection of the Early Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries of the English Nation (1810)

**The Journey of Fray Marcos**

Fray Marcos de Niza, a priest, was one of the first to go north. In 1539, he went to explore. Estevanico, the black man who had been with Cabeza de Vaca, went along. He served as a guide. With Fray Marcos were some Indian servants.

The little party traveled up the Pacific coast of Mexico. They passed through the deserts of Arizona. Estevanico and several Indians went ahead. Fray Marcos stayed behind and waited for news. Marcos de Niza had sent Estevanico ahead to look for the rich cities he thought were near. Here is what Fray Marcos says happened next:

Estevanico and the Indians moved on. A few days later they came to an Indian town called Háwikuh. This was one of the *pueblos* of the Zunis. There Estevanico quarreled with the Zunis. They killed him. His servants escaped. They ran back to Fray Marcos, who was coming up the trail.
When Fray Marcos learned of Estevanico’s death, he was afraid. He did not wish to enter Háwikuh. But he wanted to see it. So he climbed a mesa. The pueblo was far away. But in the clear air, it looked to him like a great city. He thought it might be as large as the Aztec capital Cortés had conquered years before.

Fray Marcos hurried back to Mexico City. He said that he had seen a large city. He told what his servants had said about the seven cities of Cíbola. Now everyone was eager to go north. They were sure Háwikuh was filled with gold.

Coronado’s Expedition

Francisco Vásquez de Coronado formed an expedition. Many Spaniards flocked to join him. On February 22, 1540, they were ready to start. As the expedition marched forth, there was much noise and color. Horns blew. Drums went rat-a-tat-tat. Men shouted. Horses and mules snorted. Flags waved in the breeze. Everyone was happy. The 300 soldiers were sure they would soon be rich.

The march north was long and hard. Water and food were not easy to get. Finally, Coronado reached Háwikuh. What a surprise! It was nothing like the great city Fray Marcos thought he had seen. Háwikuh was a mud and rock pueblo of a few hundred people. There was no treasure, no gold!
Coronado still hoped to find riches beyond. He sent Pedro de Tovar to explore to the northwest. Tovar and some soldiers came to the Hopi pueblos. But they had no gold either. The soldiers moved on and some of them became the first Europeans to see the Grand Canyon of Arizona.

Now, Coronado’s expedition moved east across New Mexico. It passed Acoma pueblo, high on a mesa top. The Spaniards arrived on the banks of the Rio Grande, near present-day Bernalillo. They found twelve pueblos in the area. The people spoke the Tiwa (or Tigua) language.
Coronado needed a place to stay for the coming winter. He chased the Indians from one of their *pueblos*. His own men moved in. Next, he attacked neighboring *pueblos* to get food for his men. The Indians fought back bravely. Many fled to the Sandia Mountains to escape the Spaniards.

In the spring of 1541, Coronado decided to explore the plains to the east. He heard a story that a great kingdom called Quivirá was there. The expedition stopped by Pecos Pueblo. This was one of the largest Indian towns in New Mexico. Then the Spaniards entered the plains.
Quivirá

The explorer Coronado was the first to hear of Quivirá. With his men he stopped at Pecos Pueblo in 1541. The Indians there had an Indian slave brought from Kansas.

The Spaniards named this slave the Turk, because to them he looked like a man from Turkey. The Turk said his homeland was called Quivirá. It was filled with gold and silver.

The slave was smart. He knew these new men on horseback wanted treasure. When they heard of Quivirá’s riches they would surely go there. And the Turk, guiding them, would get a free ride home.

So Coronado and his expedition left Pecos. They started for Quivirá. The Turk went in front, showing the way.

For weeks they rode over the grassy plains. They passed through the Texas Panhandle. The Spaniards crossed part of Oklahoma. Finally they arrived in central Kansas.

Quivirá at last! But where was the gold? And where was the silver that the Turk had told about?

The only thing to be seen was a village of the Wichita Indians. They lived in round houses covered with prairie grass. The Wichitas were as poor as could be!

The Turk had lied. There was no treasure in this land of Quivirá. He had fooled the Spaniards into bringing him home.

Coronado was very angry. He ordered the Turk killed. One of his men strangled the Turk with a piece of rope. That was the end of Coronado’s treasure hunt. He then started for home.
For many weeks they rode east. Once a hailstorm hit. The large hailstones dented their steel helmets and frightened the horses. It was a difficult trip.

In the end there was no reward. Quivirá, in central Kansas, had no gold. It was a poor village of Wichita Indians. All the stories of treasure were false.

At Mexico City, the Spaniards decided that Coronado’s expedition had failed. Coronado had found no great cities and no gold. The expedition had been all for nothing. The northern lands were just a wilderness. Only some poor Indians lived there.

The expedition, however, had not failed completely. Much had been learned about the geography of the northern deserts and plains. More had been learned, too, about the Pueblo Indians and their neighbors.
Later Expeditions

For many years, no one was interested in returning to the far north. That land, now called New Mexico, was nothing like the old Mexico of the Aztecs found by Cortés. Forty years passed. Then interest in New Mexico began to stir again.

In 1581, three missionaries led by Fray Agustín Rodríguez entered New Mexico. But they were killed by the Indians. The Pueblo people remembered the harsh way that Coronado’s soldiers had treated them. They wanted no more Spaniards in their homeland.

The Spaniards came anyway. Antonio de Espejo arrived in 1582 with a small party of soldiers. One of the men was Miguel Sánchez. He brought his wife Casilda and three small sons. Casilda Sánchez was the first Spanish woman to see New Mexico.

Espejo stayed only a short time. Seven years later, Gaspar Castaño de Sosa brought another expedition. He hoped to start a settlement. That plan failed and Castaño de Sosa, like Espejo, left quickly.
Beginnings of the Kingdom of New Mexico

In 1598, a rich Spanish explorer entered the area. He was Juan de Oñate. Coronado had come to New Mexico looking for gold in the pueblos. Now, Oñate was looking for silver mines in the mountains. But there is more to the story. Juan de Oñate brought settlers as well as soldiers with him. Spanish families in wagons were coming to live in New Mexico. There were men, women, and children. They brought sheep, cattle, and donkeys as well as tools for farming. These people were coming to stay. New Mexico would be their new home.

Oñate’s long wagon train rolled north through present Chihuahua. It went up the El Paso Valley and the Mesilla Valley. It crossed the desert of central New Mexico. After months on the trail, it arrived in the Española Valley.
Oñate started a new town across the Rio Grande from San Juan pueblo. He called it San Gabriel. It became the capital of New Mexico. Juan de Oñate was the first governor.

Oñate set up a government. He called the country “the Kingdom of New Mexico.” That was a grand title. It showed he expected to find silver mines. He hoped New Mexico would become a wealthy place. When it did not, New Mexico was later called a “province” instead of a kingdom. That was a lesser title.

**Early Troubles**

Some of the Pueblo Indians resisted the Spaniards. Several of Oñate’s men were attacked when they went to Acoma. Oñate’s nephew, Juan de Zaldívar, and others were killed.

From San Gabriel, Governor Oñate sent an army to punish the Acomas. The soldiers attacked the pueblo, high on its mesa. There was a terrible battle. The Indians shot arrows and threw down stones. The Spaniards shouted their battle cry: “Santiago! Santiago!” They fired their guns.

The Indians were defeated. Arrows were no match for bullets. Many Indians died. Others were taken prisoner. Acoma was burned. It was a bitter lesson for the Indians. They never forgot their anger.
Here are part of the goods brought to New Mexico in 1598 by one of Oñate's soldiers:

1 buckskin jacket
2 saddles
16 horses and colts
16 oxen
5 cows
2 carts
6 axes
2 hoes
1 hammer for horseshoeing
2 currycombs
1 iron file
2 kettles
2 frying pans
2 swords
4 pair of spurs
25 butcher knives
400 needles (for trading to the Indians)
Back at San Gabriel, Oñate had other problems. No silver had been found. His settlers had grown unhappy. They thought New Mexico would be an easy place to live. Instead life was very hard. There were no comforts. So, some of the people returned to Mexico. They left New Mexico without asking the governor. That made things harder for the few settlers who stayed.

The Founding of Santa Fe

The king of Spain heard about New Mexico’s problems. He decided to make some changes. That became easier when Juan de Oñate quit his job as governor. Don Pedro de Peralta took his place. He reached New Mexico late in 1609.

Peralta brought orders to move the capital away from San Gabriel. He looked around and found a place with water at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. There, the new governor began building the town of Santa Fe.
During 1610, work continued. Peralta chose ground for a plaza. On the north side, the Governors Palace was built. Workers started a church on the east side. Families built their houses nearby. The full name of the new capital was *La Villa Real de Santa Fe* (The Royal Town of the Holy Faith).

Today, Santa Fe is the oldest capital city in the United States. The Governors Palace still stands. Now it is a museum. People still take walks on the plaza. They also hold their fiestas there, just as the Spaniards once did. People from around the world visit and enjoy the capital city.
The Missionaries

The period after the founding of Santa Fe is called the Great Missionary Era. More than 30 padres built missions at the Indian pueblos around New Mexico.

One of the missionaries was Father Alonso de Benavides. In 1630, he wrote a report to the king. In the report, he told about life in the New Mexico missions.

Each pueblo had a mission church, said Father Benavides. There was also a house where the padre lived, called the convento. The padres taught the Indians many things besides religion. They taught them to read, write, and sing. They taught them to play music on horns and organs.
The padres also showed the Pueblo people how to farm like the Spaniards. They gave them new crops like wheat, onions, carrots, grapes, apples, and peaches. And they brought cows, sheep, horses, and donkeys to the Pueblos for the first time. But the Indians had to work at the missions. They had to follow the padres’ orders. If they tried to leave, Spanish soldiers forced them to come back.

**Growth of New Mexico**

While the missions grew, new Spanish settlers continued to arrive. By 1630, there were 250 Spaniards in Santa Fe. Many others lived on farms and ranches.

In 1659, a mission was started in El Paso. At that time El Paso was in a part of New Mexico. Later, other missions were added. Some Spanish settlers lived near the missions. El Paso became an important stop on the road between Santa Fe and Chihuahua.

The Spanish population of New Mexico in 1680 was about 3,000. Santa Fe was still the only town. There were many more Pueblo Indians, perhaps 30,000. They were getting tired of Spanish rule. Soon there would be trouble.
Treatment of the Indians

It is usually said that the Spaniards were cruel to the Indians. Sometimes that was true. But the Spanish government tried to be fair. It tried to protect the Indians by passing laws. Often the laws failed.

Men like Coronado and Oñate treated the Pueblo people harshly. Some of the Spanish settlers did, too. Even the missionaries were mean and cruel at times. Some missionaries burned the Indian *kivas*. They tried to stop the dances and other Indian ceremonies.

At first the Pueblos were friendly toward the Spaniards. They were willing to learn new things. But they wanted to keep their own customs. They wanted to keep their own religion, too. But the Spaniards would not allow that.

In a kiva at Santo Domingo Pueblo, the Indian leaders swore allegiance to the ways of the Spanish padres and Oñate.

*But why do you think the Indians wanted to keep their own customs and ceremonies?*
The king and the missionaries did not want the Pueblos to have their own culture. They wanted the Indians to give up their old ways. They wanted them to follow Spanish customs and think and act like Spaniards.

The Spaniards had one set of beliefs. The Indians believed all religions were valuable. Understanding was needed so that both people could live together peacefully in New Mexico. But in this case, understanding was not possible. In the end, there was a war.

The Spanish mission church at Acoma Pueblo, one of the oldest in New Mexico. The old convento is to the right. Can you find this in the photograph on page 64?
The Great Pueblo Revolt

In early August, 1680, two Pueblo boys were given an important job. The boys were Catua and Omtua. They were asked to carry a message of war to other Indian villages. The message was in the form of a knotted cord.

Each Pueblo leader understood the meaning of the cord. Its secret message told them when they should attack the Spaniards.

Catua and Omtua were young and strong. They could run all day without tiring. They were proud to carry the cord from village to village.

But someone told the Spaniards what the boys were doing. The boys were arrested by soldiers. They were taken to Santa Fe. The Spanish governor, Antonio de Otermín, asked them questions. He wanted to know the Pueblo plans for war.

Catua and Omtua were brave. Neither one would tell the secret plans of the Pueblos. So, the Spaniards took them to a tree and hanged them. The boys died, but they were heroes of the Pueblo Revolt.

On August 10, 1680, the revolt began. It was led by Popay (also written Popé). He was a fearless Indian from San Juan Pueblo. He brought all the Pueblos together to fight the Spaniards.
On the Spanish ranches and farms, many people were killed. Others died along the roads trying to reach Santa Fe. Missionaries were shot or stabbed. Their churches were set on fire. The sky over northern New Mexico turned black with smoke.

The soldiers and settlers in Santa Fe went to the Governors Palace. Behind the thick walls, they prepared to defend themselves. Soon, hundreds of Pueblo warriors arrived. For ten days, the Spaniards and Indians fought. Many people were killed.

At last, Governor Otermín decided his people could fight no more. The Spaniards had to leave Santa Fe to save themselves. Hungry and afraid, the people marched out of the Governors Palace. They went south to El Paso. Later, they built new homes there.

Northern New Mexico was left to the Pueblos. The Spaniards were gone. The Indians were free once again. Most hoped that the Spaniards would never return.

On the morning of the following day, Wednesday, the Pueblos attacked Santa Fe. I saw the enemy come down from the mountains where they had slept. Mounting my horse, I went out with the few soldiers I had to meet them.

The enemy saw me and halted. They began to give war-whoops, as if daring me to attack them. Later they burned the church and many houses in the villa. We fought the whole afternoon. We passed this night like the rest, with much care and watchfulness.

—Governor Otermín’s account of the Pueblo attack on Santa Fe, August 1680
The Pueblo Tricentennial

In 1980, New Mexico’s Pueblo people remembered the Great Revolt. Now, 300 years had passed. It was a time to recall history. And it was a time to remember the Indian heroes.

During the summer of 1980, the Pueblos held special ceremonies and events. Boys and young men ran from village to village. They carried knotted cords. By running, they honored the memory of Catua and Omtua. Also, they honored their Pueblo culture. The boys of today were saying that they were proud of their people and their ways.

Acee Agoyo of San Juan Pueblo ran in a special race in 1980 honoring the Tricentennial of the Pueblo Revolt.
Words to Know

capital

colony

conquer

empire

expedition

governor

mainland

mission

missionary

padre

Pueblo Revolt

revolt

tricentennial

Reviewing What You Have Read

1. Who was Hernando Cortés?

2. What kind of place did Fray Marcos think that Háwikuh was?

3. Why did the Spaniards think that Coronado’s expedition had failed?

4. What did Juan de Oñate hope to find in New Mexico?

5. How was Oñate’s expedition different from earlier Spanish expeditions?

6. What was the name of the town that Don Pedro de Peralta founded in 1610?

7. Why did the Spaniards not want the Pueblos to keep their own customs?

8. Who were Catua and Omtua?

9. Who was the leader of the Pueblo Revolt?

10. Where did the Spaniards move after the Pueblo Revolt?
For Thought and Discussion

1. Why did the first Spaniards in Mexico think that there might be rich lands in what is now New Mexico? Tell why they believed there was gold in the north.

2. Suppose that you were a Pueblo Indian during the Great Missionary Era. How would you feel about what the padres and other Spaniards were doing? Would you feel that they were helping or hurting your culture?

3. Suppose that you were a Spaniard during this same period. How would you treat the Pueblo Indians? Would you want them to accept your ways and beliefs? Why?
The only known portrait of Diego de Vargas, who in 1692 led the Spaniards returning to New Mexico.