Urban life occupied center place in the minds of the Spaniards who first encountered Mexico. Scenes of city, commerce, and marketplace predominate in the reports and memoirs written by the Spanish conquerors. As the Spanish expedition began marching inland from Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico, in August 1519, its captain, Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) paused to describe the first Mexican city he saw, Cempoala. In a letter to the emperor that he wrote on the spot, Cortés estimated that 30,000 people came to buy and sell in Cempoala’s marketplace every day. The town’s commerce in precious stones, food, medicines, clothing, and footwear was, Cortés claimed, more bountiful than that of Granada when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella took it and ended Muslim power in Spain in 1492.

Cortés may have been exaggerating, perhaps, but he knew exactly what news would impress Emperor Charles V (king of Spain from 1516 to 1556). He wanted to persuade his emperor that the expedition, which the conquerors, or conquistadores, had undertaken on their own initiative without the emperor’s knowledge, deserved royal approbation and rewards. Cortés’s companions shared his enthusiasm and his urban focus. One of the hardiest of them, Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1496–1584) recalled the thrill when they caught their first glimpse of Moctezuma’s capital, Tenochtitlán, on November 7, 1519: “When we saw all those cities and villages built in the water and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Tenochtitlán, we were astounded.”

Díaz and Cortés rejoiced at the sight of Mexico’s cities, towns, and villages; its stone temples and buildings; its water tamed by and for the community. Díaz reported that “these great towns, temples, and buildings, all made of stone and rising from the water, seemed like an enchanted vision. . . . Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream.” Above all, the Spanish conquerors
described in gleeful detail the great marketplace crowded with people, with its merchandise of every sort being sold from stalls arranged in an orderly manner.

The conquerors knew what to write to the emperor because they shared a common purpose—the discovery of a route to Asia, with its fabled cities and teeming marketplaces. Mexico seemed much like what generations of European merchants and rulers had dreamed of reaching—permanent cities like those in the Old World of Europe. Surely, the similarities suggested that Asia could not be far away.

For Spaniards, cities, towns, and villages formed the heart of civilization because commerce and political life took place in urban marketplaces (plazas). When they toured Tenochtitlán as Moctezuma’s guests the next day, they climbed to the top of a temple and looked out over the city’s largest marketplace, Tlatelolco. Díaz reported that the marketplace fulfilled a merchant adventurer’s dreams: “We turned back to the great market and the swarm of people buying and selling. The mere murmur of their voices talking was loud enough to be heard more than three miles away. Some of our soldiers who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, in Rome, and all over Italy, said that they had never seen a market so well laid out, so large, so orderly, and so full of people.” Though they thought Tlatelolco larger, better, and more crowded than any market in Europe, it reminded the conquerors of home. Cortés thought it was twice as large as the principal marketplace in Salamanca, where he had studied Latin as an adolescent. Díaz admitted that Tlatelolco outdid the marketplace of his hometown, Medina del Campo, the site of Europe’s annual international wool fair: “You could see every kind of merchandise to be found anywhere in New Spain, laid out in the same way as goods are laid out in my hometown . . . where each line of stalls has its own particular sort. So it was in this great market.”

Díaz thanked God that he and his 400 companions had survived so many obstacles on the long trek to this great city. But the success of these Spaniards who first encountered Mexico culminated a much longer journey—Castile’s emergence from collapse in the 14th century to this achievement of the European dream.

The conquerors grounded their aspirations in the historic past, not in chivalric novels or imaginative leaps into an unknown world. Their historical memory focused on the Middle Ages, when Europeans had carried on regular long-distance commerce with Asia. During that era, trade with Asia had been monopolized by consortia of merchants from Italian city-states. By galley fleets the Italian merchants shipped European merchandise east through the Mediterranean and Aegean seas to the Black Sea. There they sold heavy wool cloth manufactured by men and women in every part of Europe. With the profits they bought spices, precious stones, silk, and slaves from Asian businessmen, who brought merchandise overland by caravan along what became known as the Silk Route from central Asia, China, and India.

Exchange between Asian and European merchants began to decrease during the 14th century as political turmoil made the overland trade routes dangerous.
After bubonic plague in 1347 shattered the Mongol order that had made the long-distance caravans safe, the Ottomans captured the Italian trading outposts on the Black Sea. Italy's merchants were forced to withdraw to their trading posts in Constantinople (now Istanbul) and their islands in the Aegean Sea. Europeans watched helplessly as these mercantile enclaves fell to the Ottomans by the mid-15th century and Genoa lost its last islands in the eastern Mediterranean by the 1470s. Only the republic of Venice continued to trade with Asia, having negotiated a monopoly with the Ottoman rulers of the eastern Mediterranean.

The generation of Europeans born in the middle of the 15th century grew up with an acute sense of how much had been lost. Among these were King Ferdinand of Aragon (1452–1516), Queen Isabella of Castile (1451–1504), and Christopher Columbus of Genoa (1451–1506). They were consumed with a desire to find another way to reach the great commercial cities of Asia. When they were born, few Europeans could have predicted, or even imagined, that Spain would be one of the leaders in finding a new trade route, let alone a continent previously unknown to Europe. Yet this generation's children would be the Spaniards who first encountered Mexico.

Spain achieved its goal of exploration by refashioning itself out of the disasters that put an end to medieval Europe's trade with Asia. The first catastrophe was a change in climate, the Little Ice Age. In Spain and other parts of Europe that had been planting drought-resistant wheat since ancient Roman times, heavy rainfall beginning in 1315, known as "the first bad year," brought food crises. The wheat failed to germinate or did not reach maturity for three years in a row. For the first time in centuries, crop failures and famine devastated large areas of western Europe. To meet the demand for this essential dietary element, as
rainy years recurred, Italian merchants imported wheat—and with it plague-infected rats—from the Black Sea. The result was bubonic plague epidemics, depopulated towns, business bankruptcies, dynastic instability, and civil wars.

Spain’s medieval society, organized for war against Muslim city-kingdoms in the peninsula, crumbled under the impact of these disasters. The walled cities it had captured from the Muslims, Castile’s fabled prizes of the Reconquest, lost population. Frightened citizens fled the cities to escape epidemics. They formed squatter settlements in the countryside, where they could secure a food supply by growing their own. Out of the ruins of the medieval cities organized around war, Spain created towns and villages centering instead on production and commerce. The innovation and stability that enabled Spain to explore and settle the Americas grew out of its experience during the Renaissance as a society reconstructing itself for peace.

Spain suffered the same diseases as the rest of Europe during the Renaissance, an age of unprecedented epidemics. The Black Death epidemic of bubonic plague in 1348–50 caused as much as 40 percent overall mortality in Europe’s cities and as much as 60 percent mortality in its smaller towns and villages. Bubonic plague (Yersinia pestis) is a bacterial disease transmitted by a vector, the rat flea (Xenopsylla cheopis). After the local population of rats (Rattus rattus) dies of the infection, the rat flea, in search of a new blood supply, moves to humans and transmits the disease through biting an exposed area of skin, often on the wrist or ankle. The skin around the bite becomes necrotic, forming a hard black plaque from which the initial epidemic in 1348 received its name, the Black Death. The bacillus injected through the flea bite multiplies most rapidly in the capillaries near the lymph nodes, forming a huge, extremely painful bubo, from which the name bubonic plague is derived. Before the discovery of antibiotics, 60 percent of those infected died, regardless of their state of nutrition. The great city of Barcelona never recovered from the population, manufacturing, and commercial decline it suffered as a result of bubonic plague in the 14th century. Castile, too, suffered huge population losses from plague epidemics in 1575–77, 1596, 1601–2, and 1630.

Plague and its secondary infections killed infants at a higher rate than it did adults, but other endemic ever present infectious diseases year after year had equally disastrous effects. In nonplague years, one-quarter of all children died before the age of six of measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria, whooping cough, and diarrhea. No segment of the population escaped the ravages of these diseases.

A new infectious disease, typhus (caused by bacteria-like rickettsia), entered Spain and Italy in the late 15th century. Typhus epidemics typically broke out in crowded shipboard conditions and may have developed in the galley fleets during the new warfare against the Ottomans in the western Mediterranean. Andrés Bernáldez and most of his parishioners in the town of Los Palacios near Seville suffered this new disease in 1507, during an epidemic that swept through Castile killing about 40 percent of the population in the cities and towns it reached. In the Extremadura farm town of Cabeza de Vaca so few citizens survived the typhus epidemic that they declared the place unhealthful, tore down the houses, salted
the ground (to make the land sterile and therefore prevent any future crop cultivation), and moved to other towns.

The record showing epidemics of smallpox (a viral disease) in Europe, including Spain, is negligible before the 1560s; a milder form of pox probably prevailed. The modern notion that Europeans were innately immune to bacterial and viral infections is both biologically and historically incorrect. Virulent smallpox entered Spain in the early 17th century and held a prominent place among the diseases of the 17th and 18th centuries. Whole families of aristocratic children, for example, died of smallpox, leaving a handful of lucky distant cousins to inherit multiple noble titles and vast fortunes. Every level of society, from kings to paupers, was touched by smallpox.

An influenza pandemic (widespread outbreak) in 1580 resembled the devastating influenza of 1918 in that morbidity and mortality were especially high among young adults. Hundreds of young Castilian men, in a vast army invading Portugal in 1580, died of influenza without ever seeing battle. In contrast to the usual high mortality among infants and the elderly in most flu epidemics, this pandemic killed young adults, leaving a reduced number of adults of childbearing age to replace the population lost to bubonic plague and smallpox over the next 50 years. The combined effects of epidemics and a low birth rate resulted in a Spanish population that was one-third lower during the 17th century than in the century before.

These population losses opened the way for new political and economic leaders, who faced among themselves the problems of disease and early death. High infant mortality led to dynastic instability in monarchical societies. The Trastamara monarchs of Spain (1369–1516) were afflicted with tuberculosis, which carried them off at an average age of 37. Their successors, the Habsburgs (1516–1700), suffered agonies with tubercular joints and respiratory crises, and more than a dozen royal children died before reaching adulthood. Early deaths—together with a high rate of insanity, heirless kings, incompetent male heirs, and wars of succession that bedeviled the monarchies of England, France, and Spain during the Renaissance—gave rise to new ruling families.

Six separate medieval monarchies coalesced during the 15th century to form Spain. An illegitimate branch of the Castilian royal family, the Trastamara, bound them together. The founder of the dynasty, Henry II (ruled 1369–79), seized the throne of Castile during a brutal civil war in 1366–69. Henry, the third of Alfonso XI's illegitimate sons, could not be considered legitimate by any standards. And, having killed his half-brother King Peter, he was both a regicide and a fratricide. In 1412, after the death of the last legitimate male heir to the crown of Aragon, electors chose a brother of the Trastamara king of Castile, Ferdinand I (ruled 1412–16), as king of Aragon and Valencia and prince of Catalonia.

When Isabella, princess of Castile, married Ferdinand, prince of Aragon, in 1469, neither had a clear legal right to inherit their respective kingdoms. (Isabella did acquire her kingdom through civil war, five years after the marriage, and Ferdinand inherited his five years after that.) Nevertheless, together they
reunited the Trastamara dynasty and went on to conquer the Muslim kingdom of Granada in 1492.

In 1512, Ferdinand conquered a sixth monarchy, the kingdom of Navarre, to which he claimed rights by inheritance. The individual monarchies in the union retained their own separate laws, customs, and languages, while their combined strengths enabled the Trastamara monarchs to pursue a single-minded policy of expansion.

The same physical afflictions that had wiped out so many ruling families earlier now set the stage for a new dynasty, the Habsburgs, to plunge Spain into the politics of northern Europe. The only son of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella died at the age of 18, leaving a pregnant widow who gave birth to a stillborn child. The devastated monarchs summoned back to Castile from Portugal their cherished eldest daughter, Isabella. She had been widowed weeks after her marriage to one Portuguese crown prince, then married to another, and would die in childbirth just days after receiving the oath officially acknowledging her as the heiress apparent. Her child, Miguel, died at the age of two.

Succession to the Spanish kingdoms then passed to the monarchs' second daughter, Juana, married to Philip of Burgundy, son of the Holy Roman Emperor, a Habsburg. Because they had six living children, the succession seemed secure in Juana and Philip. Juana's behavior became so erratic, however—modern writers nicknamed her Juana la Loca (Juana the Madwoman), that she was incarcerated permanently as, apparently, a schizophrenic. Charles, her eldest son, came to Spain for the first time in 1518, when he was 18 years old, to receive the oath of the Cortés (parliament) acknowledging him as king. With Charles, heir presumptive to his paternal grandfather, the Habsburg archduke of Austria and Holy Roman Emperor, came a whole range of new possibilities for expansion.

The part of Spain that refashioned itself most successfully throughout these crises was the kingdom of Castile, which became one of the most dynamic countries in Europe. By 1530, Castile's population numbered 6 million, while all the other Spanish kingdoms together counted one-half million inhabitants. The most important reason behind Castile's growth was a legal fact: Castilians were free men and women. Serfdom had never developed in Castile, and King Ferdinand extended this freedom to the serfs of Aragon in 1485. By the mid-15th century, European monarchs had achieved consensus that their subjects could not be enslaved. By royal decree in 1500, Queen Isabella guaranteed this legal freedom to Castile's American Indian subjects with the exception of those who rebelled against the Spaniards, who were cannibals, or who were already slaves to other Indians. The royal policy toward nonslaves was the opposite, however: Non-Christians captured in war in Europe could be enslaved, as could subjects who rebelled against the royal sovereignty anywhere. In addition, European monarchs permitted the purchase of enslaved Africans from the Portuguese, who held a monopoly on slaving in sub-Saharan Africa.

Spaniards were free citizens, vecinos, of their home cities, towns, and villages. Virtually every notarized document of the period begins "I, John Doe, citizen of
the town of X, and I, Jane Smith, his wife and citizen of the town of X, do hereby . . ... These citizens governed themselves through democratic town meetings and elected town councils and judges. Each citizen household possessed a vote, but only the married men had the right to cast the vote in a town meeting and could hold municipal office. Women could speak in town meetings, and widows possessed the vote of their household. But women could not hold office or vote, and widows had to ask a male proxy—usually a son or the town judge—to cast their votes.

Whether noblemen or freemen, clergy or farmers, Spaniards lived in cities, towns, and villages. Farmers walked from their homes in the residential district to their fields and back daily. The isolated farmhouse in the countryside was the rare exception. The few people whose occupations required them to live outside the towns—millers, roadside-inn keepers, and shepherds, for instance—were regarded as outside the norms of society. Popular and high literature alike often depicted these exceptions to the rule as lecherous, venal, and violent. The fictional Don Quixote's bizarre adventures, first published in 1605, could take place only outside the norm of municipal life.

The most dramatic sociological innovation of the age of plague took place during the 15th century, in the form of thousands of new towns and villages. The greatest expansion of that century unfolded within Spain itself, initiated by and implemented through ordinary people. In 1492, when Columbus launched his momentous voyage from the seaport of Palos, the town was barely a century old. In this, it was typical of the new settlements in Castile. Palos first appears in a Spanish document dated 1380, when it was a squatter settlement within the municipal territory of the town of Moguer. That year, King John I of Castile legally separated the village of Palos from the town of Moguer, made it into a town, and sold it to a nobleman from Seville, Alvar Pérez de Guzmán.

Alvar Pérez, as señor (lord) of Palos, proceeded to develop the economic infrastructure of his new town in order to attract families. First the king exempted from all royal taxes the first 50 families that would come to settle in Palos. Because almost no land was suitable for cultivating wheat, Alvar Pérez planted olive trees and built a warehouse on the shore, where the seamen of Palos could auction their fresh fish. He drew up municipal ordinances and delegated his judicial and executive authority over Palos to the town council. This council, elected annually by the voting citizens, took the oath of office in the presence of the lord or his proxy and received from him the varas (staffs) of justice. After Alvar Pérez died in 1394, his daughters Isabel and Juana authorized the building of a Franciscan monastery, Santa María de La Rábida, within the town's borders.

The town council and its judges developed the new town's economy further. By the mid-15th century, Palos had a municipal shipyard and an extensive salt extraction industry; the town trapped seawater at high tide in shallow ponds (salt pans), which evaporated quickly in the summer heat, leaving a thick crust of salt for the men of Palos to harvest. With this municipal income, the town council built a parish church as well as a civic marketplace where the citizens carried on
their everyday business. The town’s sole financial obligation to its lord was to pay a 5 percent sales tax on the fish auctioned on the beach to wholesalers.

The prosperity of Palos attracted new settlers, even though these latecomers did not receive the royal tax exemptions the first ones had. Most of the town’s citizens made their living from the sea as fishermen, import-export merchants, shipbuilders, and pirates—the latter, almost a standard occupation in fishing communities. Fish, olive oil, and salt—the trinity of the preserved-fish industry—were the town’s major exports, wheat its main import. By 1478, the town’s population had grown to 600 households.

On May 23, 1492, the men of Palos responded to a royal summons to attend a town council meeting in the parish church of San Jorge. There the town crier read a letter from Queen Isabella ordering Palos to contribute two caravels (shallow-drafted ships that could safely enter inlets and coastal waters) for three months’ royal service. The town clerk, Francisco Fernández, recorded the reading of the royal order. He certified that two noncitizens were present: a Franciscan from the monastery of La Rábida, Juan Pérez, and a foreign businessman, Christopher Columbus, as well as the usual town judge and three town councilmen. The customary practice then was for most city and town councils to pledge to obey royal decrees but not execute them until they could negotiate better terms. But in this instance Palos had to comply, because its seamen had been charged with violating Portuguese waters and the Spanish monarchy had paid heavy fines. Now Palos either had to reimburse the royal treasury or see its citizens imprisoned.

Under these circumstances, the town council paid the cost of leasing two caravels, the Niña and the Pinta. The local businessmen who owned these ships, members of the Pinzón family—probably the trespassers who had wrongly entered foreign waters—agreed to captain the two ships. Thus the seamen of Palos sailed into the pages of history. A few days later, in the port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Christopher Columbus leased a large Basque cargo ship, Santa María, from her owner, Juan de la Cosa, who agreed to captain her.

The interplay here between the town of Palos and the Spanish monarchy reveals the normal relationship at the time between local and royal government. Because the Trastamara dynasty had seized power through extraordinary measures, it had to be innovative to maintain itself in power. The illegitimacy of the Trastamara impelled them to seek support aggressively from nontraditional sources: the small towns and villages that were flourishing while the cities languished. Any growing village that found itself chafing under the rule of its governing city welcomed the Trastamara policy of conferring municipal autonomy on villages and giving them to nobles as seigneurial (subject to a lord) towns.

Lords and kings delegated the governing of their towns to the towns’ councils and rarely interfered, with the result that towns enjoyed nearly as much autonomy as cities. The town sheriff, for instance, arrested suspects and brought them before the town judge, who heard cases, pronounced sentence, and imposed fines and punishments. Town judges held jurisdiction over all criminal and civil cases
arising within the town boundaries and exercised the power of capital punish-
m ent. Town councils owned and administered the municipal commons, such as
the salt mines of Palos. For this autonomy the citizens of seignorial towns cooper-
ated with the Trastamara monarchs.

In order to prevent themselves from being overthrown by neighbors with
more legal right to inherit the throne, the Trastamara dynasty simply absorbed
adjacent realms. These acquisitions by the Trastamara dynasty shaped local gov-
ernment in most of the Iberian Peninsula. There were in fact no regional govern-
ments—provincial governments were not created in Spain until the 19th century.
Instead the monarchy depended on, and communicated directly with, municipal governments to carry out royal policy and collect taxes. The city and
town councils wrote directly to their kings and queens when carrying out their
administrative duties on behalf of the monarchy or requesting favors in return.
This correspondence between small municipalities and their monarchs has left us
a vast treasury of testimony about the details of everyday life witnessed by ordi-
nary citizens.
Rulers and ruled alike shared the most basic assumption in Spanish society—that municipalities were the fundamental, indispensable units of civilization, the cells that made up the body politic. Such a cell was a complex system of parts and events, all interconnected in a dynamic system of relationships. Citizens, lords, monarchs, and clergy shared a detailed—and usually unexpressed—knowledge of the internal mechanisms of the municipality and its natural course of development. They took for granted the internal workings and political competence of the town councils. They understood the legal constraints of the system but knew how to maneuver around them to achieve their goals. Spain, the most powerful absolute monarchy in 16th-century Europe, governed itself through direct connections between the king and thousands of minute municipal corporations.

Every city and town had its own fuero (constitution) that defined its relationship with the king or lord and contained the local laws governing commerce, contracts, and inheritance. Despite the number and diversity of the different codes of law, an ideal of equality prevailed in the inheritance laws throughout the Spanish kingdoms. The only inheritance subject to the rule of primogeniture (inheritance by only the oldest son) was succession to the monarchy.

The common notion that younger sons emigrated to the West Indies because they would not inherit has no basis in Spanish law or practice. In general, all the children of a marriage—both male and female—had the right to inherit
equitable portions of their parents' property. Parents could not exclude a child, except in extreme cases such as if a child attempted to murder a parent. Because the laws mandated, and the towns' judges enforced, the partition of inheritance, parents had no need to draw up wills, which were extremely rare in the 15th century. In Mexico, wills would become more common, even though partible inheritance remained the rule because of the great distance between family members on both sides of the Atlantic.

Spaniards from the king on down to the farmer-citizen of the smallest town shared a widespread commitment to a participatory tradition of town government. In Castile, towns and villages averaged about 150 households and held town meetings regularly. But once a town grew to more than some 300 or so households, factions became too powerful for town meetings to arrive at a consensus. The larger towns and cities thus came to dispense with town meetings in favor of decision making by the town council.

These practices of municipal government became entrenched in Castilian society not just because they seemed indispensable and natural but also because they were automatic. That which is most habitual most strongly resists change—and also escapes notice. Many historians tell us, for example, that the Spaniards were very litigious, and they are right. Few notice, however, that it was the towns that initiated the overwhelming majority of lawsuits, and that every such lawsuit began with a town meeting in which the citizens voted unanimously to give their power of attorney to a specific lawyer. The very depth at which municipal democratic habits were embedded in Castilian society makes them almost invisible.

Spaniards found that their need for power over their daily lives could be satisfied only by participating in municipal government. Castile's citizens rose up in protest against anyone who tried to deprive them of this essential right. In the town of Medellín, the citizens who were knights and noncommissioned officers in the municipal militia traditionally elected the town judge and town councilmen. But in 1480, the lord, the Count of Medellín, began to choose these officials himself. By 1488, the traditional electors were so upset with this infringement on their powers that they protested to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Among the 26 signatories of the protest were Martín Cortés, father of the infant Hernán Cortés, and eight women. In such cases the monarchs nearly always sided with the citizens and against the lord, as happened in this case.

Spaniards' hunger for land and water also bound them to urban life. By 1500, all the land of Spain was incorporated into more than 32,000 cities, towns, and villages. Farmers owned their own fields and gardens as private property, but the montes (uncultivated commons) and its resources belonged to the comuna, the municipal corporation. This town council controlled all the standing and running water, the forests, pasture, game, wild fruits and herbs, and quarries. The town councils owned the commons, so the judges and councilmen not only administered local justice but also managed the natural resources of the municipal territory.

The town councils provided for the common welfare by setting prices and inspecting weights and measures in the plaza, hiring the town schoolteacher, and
building bridges, fountains, laundries, and churches. The council developed and managed the infrastructure of the town's farmland by constructing dams and irrigation systems, terracing hillsides, and clearing sections of the commons to expand cultivation.

Agriculture and commerce expanded as Spain's population grew; in fact, the two were indistinguishable. Spanish farmers owned their own farms and in slack seasons worked as artisans, teamsters, and retail merchants. Urban wholesalers and bureaucrats owned farms. With growing demand for food and wine, Castilian farmers increased and diversified their production. They added more land to cultivation by planting hillsides with perennials, especially grapevines and olive trees. In response to rising demand for textiles, rope, and paper, farmers planted flax and hemp, and increased the size of their transhumant (migratory) sheep flocks. Farm towns built processing facilities to turn these crops into market commodities. Typically, town councils constructed threshing grounds, wool-washing stations, flax- and hemp-soaking ponds, and fulling mills.

Some of Spain's most spectacular fortunes in wool, international trade, and land started from modest beginnings in the early 15th century, when Castile regained its pre-Black Death population levels and embarked on nearly a century of domestic growth. With rising fortunes came upward social mobility. Successful farmers became wealthy businessmen who used their plow mules and oxen to transport their produce, sold it in the cities, used the profits to buy city goods, and sold these back in their hometowns.

Citizens of the largest cities and the smallest farm towns alike saw town life as the goal worth striving for and thought it indispensable for their commercial agrarian economy. Each town prudently undertook to provide its citizens, individually and communally, with the infrastructure of commerce: plazas, roads, bridges, ferries, hospitals, and roadside inns for traveling merchants. Our modern distinctions between rural and urban, agrarian and commercial did not exist in their world or in how they designed their towns and cities.

Just as Spain was a monarchy of cities and towns, a noble estate was a cluster of towns. The Trastamara monarchs gave away the right to govern towns as hereditary property to military leaders who had helped them gain the throne in the civil war. To ensure that these new seigneurial towns would remain in loyal hands, the Trastamara monarchs required that they be placed in mayorazgos (perpetual trusts), of which the monarchs were the trustees and the new lords the beneficiaries.

After 1400, the monarchs introduced another innovation, giving hereditary titles of nobility to the lords of seigneurial towns. In 1400, Castile had fewer than a dozen noble titles, none of them hereditary. By the end of the century, the kingdom boasted more than 100 hereditary titles of nobility.

These titles did not transfer lordship from the monarchy to a lord; instead, each grant of a noble title ended lawsuits or feuds that had erupted after the untimely deaths of direct heirs to an already existing señorío (lordship). For this reason, each noble title was the name of a town whose lordship had been in
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dispute between rival heirs. The first hereditary title was Count of Alba, granted in 1439 by King John II and elevated to Duke of Alba in 1465 by King Henry IV. In 1520, Charles V ranked the titled nobles and designated the wealthiest as grandees. The dates when those hereditary noble titles were created, and the size of their annual incomes by 1520, shown in the table below, indicate how quickly the nobility was changing and how widely noble incomes diverged from one another in 15th-century Castile.

Top Grandees of Castile in the Order Established by Emperor Charles V in 1520

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date Created</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Annual Income in Ducats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constable of Castile</td>
<td>1492</td>
<td>Velasco</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiral of Castile</td>
<td>1405</td>
<td>Enríquez</td>
<td>32,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Alba</td>
<td>1465</td>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Infantado</td>
<td>1475</td>
<td>Mendoza</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Medina Sidonia</td>
<td>1445</td>
<td>Guzmán</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Béjar</td>
<td>1485</td>
<td>Zúñiga</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Medinaceli</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>La Cerda</td>
<td>16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Alburquerque</td>
<td>1464</td>
<td>La Cueva</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Arcos</td>
<td>1493</td>
<td>Ponce de León</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Escalona</td>
<td>1472</td>
<td>Pacheco</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
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Most nobles lived in cities, where they sought to increase their fortunes by, among other pursuits, acting as international merchants. These lords had surpluses to sell because their seigneurial towns paid them annuities half in cash and half in commodities such as wheat, barley, wine, olive oil, cheese, silk, and honey. Nobles incurred no stigma by engaging in wholesale or international commerce (though this would change, in theory at least, during the Bourbon period, the 18th century). Most of them tried to capitalize on their in-kind revenues by building various facilities in the cities where they lived. The second Count of Tendilla (1442–1515), captain-general of the newly conquered kingdom of Granada, invested in that city by purchasing buildings in the heart of the city and renting out their ground floors as shops and upper floors as apartments. He bought flour mills on the city’s two rivers, a teamsters’ inn at the juncture of the city’s two busiest streets, and a tavern just outside the principal city gate, Bibrambla. He bought a galley ship to transport the horses he bred and sold to Castilian garrisons in North Africa. Foolishly, however, he did not buy marine insurance and thus lost his investment when the ship sank off Gibraltar in a pirate attack. Other nobles who had more success with maritime ventures built their own fleets or ports.

The most notable international shipping magnates of Castile, the dukes of Medinaceli and Medina Sidonia, combined their military and commercial roles, to the advantage of themselves and the monarchy. These two titled nobles possessed as royal monopolies the tuna catch off Spain’s southwestern Atlantic coast. There they built packing facilities on shore and purchased fleets to transport the
The annual almadraba, or tuna catch, produced the major income for the Cádiz region and the dukes of Medina Sidonia. Two rows of men pull nets full of live tunas onto the beach, while others kill the fish with harpoons. In the foreground, women cook some of the catch, and a man carries a tuna on his back into the warehouse. The dukes of Medina Sidonia shipped the preserved tuna, packed in salt or olive oil, to markets in Italy, France, and northern Europe.

preserved tuna to markets throughout Europe. But Muslim piracy in the Strait of Gibraltar, between Africa and Spain, either by North African or Granadan ships, posed a serious threat to their export business.

To counter this threat, in 1462, the second Duke of Medina Sidonia financed and led a force that conquered Gibraltar. The third duke, Juan de Guzmán (1466–1507), financed a fleet and army that conquered Melilla from the Muslim king of Tlemcén in 1496. Holding this North African entrepôt (trading outpost) as his own territory, Medina Sidonia commanded an advantage in maritime shipping through the Strait of Gibraltar. Meanwhile, the Duke of Medinaceli decided to build his own port and warehousing facilities in his town of Puerto de Santa María, across the bay from Cádiz. During this period of expansion he employed a Genoese merchant named Christopher Columbus in his export business. Through such individual, privately financed initiatives Spain grew in power and wealth throughout the 15th century, creating a society of merchant farmers and noble merchants eager to engage in world commerce by land and sea. The grandees of Castile were a new nobility actively engaged in domestic and international trade.

Ferdinand and Isabella refused to give hereditary lordship to anyone in the Americas, Spaniard or Indian, in order to retain the seigneurial income of the New World for their royal treasury. Their grandson, Charles V, gave conquerors in the Americas encomienda (lifetime lordship) over some Native American towns. He also bent the royal policy in exceptional cases, granting two hereditary lordships in the Americas. In 1529, he gave the conqueror of Mexico, Hernán Cortés, hereditary lordship over the valley of Oaxaca, with the title Marquis of the
Valley, and in 1537, he named Columbus's grandson Duke of Veragua (Central America) in exchange for giving up the office of Admiral of the Ocean Sea and abandoning claims to other concessions made to his famous grandfather.

Titled nobles made up a small subset of an elite social class, the tax-exempt nobles known as hidalgos. They acquired this status by serving the interests of the monarchy in some individual rather than communal capacity. Most hidalgos served as members of the royal household or staff or in the judiciary. Another numerically large group of the tax-exempt achieved this status by having served in a royal military unit rather than in a municipal militia. Nobles, their families, and their households owed royal service as vassals of the king. Only a handful of hidalgos inherited their tax-exempt status, with most acquiring it through royal service or purchase.

Royal service could be construed very broadly. One farmer received hidalgo status simply because he had 11 living children. The entire population of Spain's north coast, who were critical to the monarchy's defense during wartime because most of them were seamen or worked in building or provisioning ships, enjoyed hidalgo status. Moreover, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella granted tax exemption to all Spaniards who settled in the Americas. The Habsburg kings, chronically strapped for funds to fight their European wars, sometimes sold hidalgo status to obtain immediate cash.

The clergy had no need of citizenship or hidalgo status. When they professed their religious vows, they became subjects of the church, exempt from both royal and local taxes. At the same time, they made themselves subject to a bishop or abbot rather than the town council, and to ecclesiastical rather than municipal law and judges. Each held a lifetime church office whose endowed property provided his income. The clergy formed a distinct community, living within an urban nucleus yet belonging to a different corporate body.

Non-Christians did not possess citizenship under any circumstances. Jews and Muslims were royal subjects but not citizens of municipalities. More than 200 of Spain's oldest cities and towns acquired large Jewish communities during the 12th and 13th centuries, when Jews expelled from France and England built new lives in the Iberian Peninsula. These communities lived in Christian cities and towns but operated under Jewish law administered by their own rabbis. Each local Jewish community paid taxes directly to the monarchy, but the taxes were negotiated, collected, and delivered to the royal treasury by Jewish leaders instead of the municipal government.

Involvement in the communal welfare and the opportunity for upward mobility that marked most of the population did not benefit the poorest segments of the populace. The most desperately poor—widows, orphans, the poor elderly, and the disabled—became the responsibility of their town or village councils. Throughout the 16th century, landless males grew in number. Those who did not become soldados (salaried employees) by signing an annual contract with a farmer reported daily to the early-morning work call in the town marketplace. These jornaleros (farm laborers) found work irregularly and less frequently
as labor became more abundant during the 16th-century population increase. The most desperate resorted to a vagrant lifestyle, drifting from town to town or moving to cities in hopes of finding work as peones (day laborers) in the shipping or construction industries. At the lowest levels of urban society, the anonymous poor recipients of municipal charity sank into the role of vividly individualized criminals in the judicial records. In contrast to the upward path of the vast majority of the population, the social mobility of the landless poor almost invariably followed a downward curve.

Castilians regarded their own country as a haven of peace and religious harmony compared to the rest of Europe, which was wracked by religious wars unleashed by the Protestant Reformation after 1517. Responses to a questionnaire that Philip II sent around Castile in 1575 eventually trickled back to the royal court from more than 500 towns and villages. In them the municipal elders described a farming world of considerable self-confidence and religious tranquillity.

Much of this perception derived from the religious realities of small-town Spain. Because more than 80 percent of the Spanish population lived in small towns and villages that had been founded during the Trastámara period, that population tended to be homogeneous; settlers gathered as refugees from epidemics or ambitious farmers seeking better economic opportunities. Their sense of community formed as they worked together to establish the essential foundations of a municipality. Together they cleared fields for plowing, built homes, and constructed parish churches.

Local religious practices deepened each community’s sense of its own identity. Every citizen belonged to a confraternity of souls that provided burial services. During times of natural disaster, a town meeting might agree to establish a new devotion to Saint Augustine to ward off a locust infestation, for example, or a new confraternity dedicated to Saint Sebastian during a plague epidemic. Parish priests played a limited role in a town’s religious life because, as the village of Getafe explained, priests came and went, but “as long as the town exists there will be a town council.” The town council hired a theatrical troupe to perform the annual Corpus Christi play in early summer, distributed charity, and administered funds endowed to provide masses for the dead. The town councils did not let religious differences disrupt the flow of commerce. Medina del Campo held markets on Wednesdays and Sundays and observed the sabbath on Thursdays. The town council devised this schedule in order to compete against other market towns for the business of non-Christian merchants.

In contrast, the cities swirled with religious tension. Although disagreements were couched in theological or spiritual terms, most of the tension derived from power struggles. Spain’s Jewish population had converted to Christianity in huge numbers by the mid-15th century. The Trastámara monarchs encouraged conversion by rewarding new Christians with royal and church offices. These converts demanded equal municipal rights with other Christians, including the privileges of citizenship and the right to hold municipal office. In the face of this
expectation of equality, the entrenched elite and longtime Christians who hoped to advance socially and politically erected formidable barriers.

Municipal office was the most avidly sought route to social and political status. In Toledo conflict over eligibility for city offices erupted during a tax revolt in 1449 when the city council passed a statute to prohibit those whose ancestors had been Jews from holding public office. This tactic was part of the council’s stated intention to protect the Christian faith from converts who, it claimed, were likely to relapse. At the time, many of Toledo’s city councilmen and municipal officials, including tax collectors, were converts. Both pope and king disapproved of this “statute of pure blood,” but the city passed it several times during the last half of the century, and by 1566, the monarchy had also begun advocating it. The statute did not keep converts off the city council; it just made such offices more expensive and complicated to buy. Men who were popularly known or suspected to be of Jewish heritage continued to buy seats on the city council and grants of tax exemption called bidalgüitas from the crown municipal office.

Religious tension in Toledo and many other cities intensified when cathedral chapters engaged in power struggles with their bishops or cathedral deans. Prejudice against converts and against men of low social class often shaped attitudes among the canon priests on Toledo’s cathedral staff, for example. During the 15th century, the Castilian monarchs had usurped the traditional right of cathedral chapters to nominate new bishops and, to avoid the problem of ending up with prelates from aristocratic families who wielded too much power, began nominating men of lesser social status. In the mid-16th century, the canons of the cathedral, many of them members of local elite convert families, resented the rude, heavy-handed manner of their new archbishop, Cardinal Juan Martínez de Siliceo, which they attributed to his nonaristocratic background and foreign education. The unpopular archbishop and his intransigent canons showed their disdain for each other in a protracted dispute over the qualifications for new appointees; the archbishop wanted to eliminate men of lower social class. In the end, they compromised by excluding persons from each other’s backgrounds; the new cathedral statute stated that in the future only men of high social status and old Christian heritage could hold cathedral offices.

Tensions simmered wherever friars preached. In the last decade of the 14th century, massive conversions to Christianity followed urban violence against Jews, inspired by Franciscan friars fired with a vision of total conversion. Then, in the 15th century, itinerant Dominican preachers set off popular riots attacking new converts. As a result, in 1478 the monarchs, in an effort to defuse popular violence toward converts, instituted the Spanish Inquisition.

This ecclesiastical court moved into a city or town, invited Christians to confess their lapses, imposed penance, and then used information gained from these voluntary confessions to apprehend and interrogate others. From 1540 (the earliest period for which documentation survives for all of Spain) to 1700, Inquisition tribunals tried 44,000 cases, an average of 275 per year. Some 22,000 of these cases were tried during the height of the Inquisition’s activity, from 1560
through 1614. Executions in effigy of those tried in absentia or postmortem averaged 2 percent of those tried, and actual executions averaged 2.3 percent of those tried. The Inquisition tribunal in the kingdom of Aragon led with 29 percent of all those executed. Tomás de Torquemada, the Dominican inquisitor-general for Castile and Aragon, persuaded King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to expel the Jews from Spain in 1492.

The Inquisition policed the beliefs and practices of those who claimed to be Christian. By this time, Franciscan and Dominican preachers moving from city to city had succeeded in publicizing their ambition to convert all Spaniards to Christianity. But the Inquisition never achieved this objective. In fact, Torquemada concluded from evidence extracted in Inquisition trials that unconverted Jews were actively encouraging converts to relapse. The monarchs decided that the only way to protect converts was to expel the Jews. Accordingly, they issued a royal decree to this effect in January 1492, requiring all Jews to convert to Christianity or leave Spain by the end of July. About one-half of the Spanish Jewish population quickly converted, while the remainder—perhaps 50,000 Jews—traveled by sea and land to Portugal; Navarre, on the French border, and North Africa. Then, not content with limiting their activities to Spain, the Franciscans expanded their ambitions to converting Africa—a special enthusiasm of the monastery at La Rábida in Palos. When that project failed, they shifted their sights to the Americas.

The monarchs meanwhile poured their resources into conquering the kingdom of Granada, the one Muslim government still remaining on the Iberian Peninsula. Their decision to conquer Granada was driven by commercial ambition. Spain had long been one of the great seafaring nations of Europe. By the end of the 15th century it had become a leader in the new enterprise of exploring the Atlantic. As noted earlier, the Trastamara's wanted to expand their empire by entering into commerce with Asia. Ferdinand's kingdom of Aragon was expanding east into the Mediterranean, engaged in an ongoing sea war against ships from Genoa, Italy, to control the shipping lanes to Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily. Ferdinand himself initiated the war of territorial conquest that won the kingdom of Naples for Aragon.

In contrast, Castile's fishing and merchant fleets were expanding west into the Atlantic. Though they had ports on both the Mediterranean and Atlantic, Castilian ships that tried to bring cargoes from the Mediterranean to north European ports through the Strait of Gibraltar met two formidable obstacles—the Muslim kingdom of Granada on the Iberian Peninsula and the Portuguese fleet on the Atlantic.

The Trastamara rulers had a powerful economic reason to maintain their alliance with Granada. Every year, the king of Granada paid about one-quarter of his royal income, approximately 12,000 gold doubloons, in tribute to the monarch of Castile. Furthermore, the Castilian trade with North Africa flowed fairly smoothly through Granadan and Italian middlemen. A treaty dating back
to 1279 with a consortium of Genoese merchants gave them a monopolistic trading post in Granada’s seaport of Málaga.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, on the other hand, had powerful commercial reasons to try to gain control of Granada. For one, they wanted to protect Spanish shipping, which remained vulnerable to attack from North Africa by sea and from Granada by land. More urgently, the fabled silk markets of Granada and Málaga lured these monarchs to opt for potential commercial profits over the more secure tribute. With this aim, in 1482, they began annual war campaigns against the kingdom of Granada. From that year until the end of 1485, the Castilian policy of frontal attacks against the city of Granada itself failed. The surrounding terrain proved too rugged for a rapid advance, and the supply line was too long through hostile territory to support a prolonged campaign.

Finally, Ferdinand and Isabella isolated the city from its seaports and surrounding farmland. In 1487, they besieged and captured Málaga and enslaved 11,000 to 15,000 of its citizens because they had resisted so fiercely. The lesson was not lost on the people of Granada. As one port after another fell to the Christian armies, the citizens of the capital escaped to Africa. Granada surrendered without a fight and received favorable terms for doing so. The defeated Muslim ruler transferred sovereignty to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella on January 2, 1492, and the Castilian monarchs officially entered the city on January 6.

The first task facing the victors was to appraise the booty. Royal treasury secretary Hernando de Zafra’s massive survey of property in the city and its countryside lasted until 1497. This review shaped how the city would be rebuilt by identifying and appraising each abandoned house, parcel of land, tax, and endowment to transfer them intact to the victors.

The monarchs distributed the spoils in the centuries-old process of repartimiento (distribution). In Granada, the Catholic monarchs took for the royal domain all the taxes, land, palaces, fortresses, and city walls that had previously been the property of the Muslim royal family. They gave to the church the endowments that had previously supported Islamic religious and charitable foundations. They also gave certain public properties, such as Muslim cemeteries, livestock and fish markets, water reservoirs, fountains, public baths, sewer systems, streets, and the surrounding pastures and wilderness to the municipal corporation of Granada. These public properties became the commons, owned by the city council. Finally, the monarchs distributed the abandoned lands and houses to individual conquerors. The city and the monarchs amended and redefined the terms of the distribution for several years as they became aware of unexpected needs and found resources that had been overlooked.

After distributing the spoils, the victors repopulated the conquered city. They brought their wives and children to Granada and occupied its formerly Muslim buildings. The second Count of Tendilla’s wife and young children joined him and set up housekeeping in the Alhambra, of which he was the royal commander.
Their first child born in this new home, Antonio de Mendoza, would one day be the first viceroy of New Spain, the representative of the king himself.

Under the terms of the capitulation agreement, the Islamic inhabitants of Granada were allowed to retain their religion, laws, and customs. But the same taxes they used to pay to the Muslim ruler they now paid to the Christian monarchs. During this transitional period, Muslim officials collaborated with Christian royal officers in administering the city. All indications are that the royal administrators treated the Muslim population with tolerance and tried to accommodate the city’s bicultural population. It is clear that the Muslims vastly outnumbered the Christians.

By 1497, enough Christians had established residence in the city to establish a municipal government. The first city council meetings of Granada, begun in 1497, have continued to the present day. Nevertheless, the city failed to prosper.

The first problem erupted when the new archbishop of Toledo, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, visited Granada in late 1499 and began baptizing Muslim orphans. Infuriated by what they perceived to be a violation of the peace agreement, some Muslims rioted and killed two sheriffs. The violence in the city stopped only after diplomatic intervention by the Count of Tendilla. But by this time the uprising had spread to the surrounding mountain villages. Royal troops directed by King Ferdinand eventually put down the revolt. Ferdinand and Isabella considered that the agreement had been irretrievably broken by this revolt and required the Muslim population to convert to Christianity by the beginning of the year 1501. The preconquest population of Granada, estimated at about 100,000, declined after this as Muslims moved to Africa rather than convert.

The city was further devastated by typhus in 1507, which carried off Archbishop Hernando de Talavera and the Count of Tendilla’s wife and youngest children. By 1512, the total population of Granada had dropped to some 80,000 and continued to decline throughout the 16th century. Its conquest by Christian forces transformed Granada from the capital city of the last Muslim kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula into a defeated, deeply divided outpost on the periphery of Castilian political affairs.

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The secret of the Portuguese maritime expansion of the years 1400–1580 lay in its being a significant departure from the Italian model. Instead of working through consortia of businessmen as the Italians had, the Portuguese expansion made use of the royal monopoly. The king or other members of the royal family commissioned each voyage and selected which ship owner was to captain the venture. After a successful voyage, the monarch divided the profits with the captain, who in turn distributed a share of his profits to the crew.

Portuguese merchants, like their Italian predecessors, did not treat their trading stations as colonies. Only military and royal administrators were on hand in
foreign outposts to protect merchants as they arrived, unloaded their cargoes, loaded their purchases, and departed. In Africa, India, South Asia, Japan, and Brazil the Portuguese established trading posts without family households, a civilian community, or civil governments.

Within this mold, Portuguese expansion in the Atlantic evolved throughout the 15th century. One of the royal princes, Henry the Navigator (1394–1460), took a prominent role in the capture of Ceuta, opposite Gibraltar, in 1415, then sponsored voyages of commercial exploration in the Atlantic and south along the west coast of Africa. One of his ships brought back the first slaves and gold from Guinea. In 1448, Henry built a fort and warehouse on the island of Arguin (in modern Mauritania). A few years later this trading post was successfully exploiting the Guinea trade; an Italian traveler reported that many Portuguese ships arrived every year bringing wheat, cloth, and horses and taking away gold, some 700 or 800 slaves, silk, and cotton. But on the African coast, the Portuguese were not able to take the territory by force. They were repeatedly repulsed by armed native forces in canoes who attacked Portuguese landing crews and prevented them from reaching the shore.

Instead of attempting conquest, the Portuguese royal family negotiated with local rulers to gain for themselves a monopoly on trade between African ports and European merchants. In their most important African market, the Saharan port of Safi (now in Morocco), terminus of a caravan route where traders from the interior sold raw wool and bought salt and wool cloth, they acquired exclusive European trading rights. When Genoese merchants tried to trade in Safi in 1454, for example, the Portuguese judge there found them guilty of violating the monopoly and cut off their hands. It seems safe to assume that when Christopher Columbus's father dealt in raw wool from Safi a few years later, he bought it from a Portuguese vendor.

In 1480, King John of Portugal negotiated to establish a trading post on the Guinea mainland near a native gold-mining operation. The local ruler agreed to give the Portuguese sole trading rights in the area and allowed John to build a fortified trading post there, Saint George of the Mine. The profitability of this particular post became legendary. The point that royal sponsorship and protection were necessary for business success when dealing with overseas governments was not lost on other rulers.

Royal monopolies garnered huge profits. The Portuguese trade monopoly in West Africa became the envy of every ruler in Europe, especially the Castilian kings, who proceeded to compete with and imitate them. Ferdinand and Isabella incorporated the key elements of Portuguese success into the contract that launched their enterprise in the Americas. In the contract called the Santa Fe Capitulations, signed on April 17, 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella formed a business partnership with Columbus to engage in trade and commerce with Asia.

As the monarchs' sole partner, Columbus had the right to supply one-eighth of the cargo on all voyages to Asia and take one-eighth of the profits. The monarchs determined the destination and route, chose Columbus to command the
voyage and manage the trading, and provided the ships, crew, provisions, and cargo. The king and queen supplied Columbus with letters of introduction to Asian rulers and empowered him to negotiate trade treaties with these rulers on behalf of the Castilian monarchy. Thus, from the very beginning, the Spanish voyages were not to be carried out on the traditional Genoese model. Instead of a consortium of merchants, there were trade agreements between sovereign rulers. The old world of Italian overseas expansion ended before it even started in the Americas. The Portuguese model was the one that Ferdinand and Isabella chose.

Columbus implemented the Portuguese model on his very first voyage. The opportunity arose on Christmas day of 1492, when his flagship Santa María ran aground off the north shore of the island of La Española (now Hispaniola, the modern republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic). He and the crew saved most of the cargo, but his remaining ships, Niña and Pinta, did not have enough room to take everyone back to Spain. So Columbus established a stockaded trading post, which he named La Navidad. The parallels of this operation with those of the Portuguese are striking: Columbus departed for Spain, leaving behind merchandise, equipment, provisions, and 38 men under the command of the fleet marshal. All the men, whether they stayed in La Navidad or returned to Spain, were salaried employees of the Spanish Crown.

Ferdinand and Isabella feared Portuguese interference with their new trading post on the supposed route to Asia. Consequently, on Columbus's second voyage, in 1493, they insisted on sending cavalry to protect the trading post. When Columbus returned to La Navidad, however, he found all the Europeans dead. The natives, whom Columbus had described as meek and friendly, turned out to be just as hostile and competent in war as the Africans fighting the Portuguese. Columbus's almost immediate strategy of using cavalry against the natives in the rugged interior only caused damage to the horses and created disgust among the Spaniards.

Columbus abandoned the site of La Navidad and constructed a new trading post that he called La Isabela, for his royal sponsor. Here he built a stone structure to serve as the royal storehouse, all trade being a royal monopoly. Columbus held not only the office of admiral but also the legal rights to profits as the business partner and commercial agent of the monarchs. The salaried employees—1,200 on the second voyage—would have to buy their European food, equipment, and clothing from the royal storehouse. This at least was the plan, patterned on Saint George of the Mine.

The era of royal monopolies and trading posts with salaried employees ended quickly. The years between the first Columbian voyage in 1492 and Columbus's death in 1506 were the most complex and volatile ones in the encounter between the New World and the Old. In these first few years the Spanish monarchs adapted to the American reality. Ferdinand and Isabella reassessed their relationship with Columbus, reformed their commercial policy, and transformed the Spanish and Indian settlements in the Americas. Their growing awareness of the Americas forced an end to the old period of European exploration and expansion.
By early 1494, a resupply fleet returning to Spain had brought a report from the La Isabela trading post that made Ferdinand and Isabella understand that the Portuguese exploration model would not work in the Americas. They had sent Columbus on a second voyage designed to fortify and expand the trading post into a supply station. But it quickly became apparent that the Spaniards at the post could not produce enough food and fodder there for themselves and their cavalry. The European crops that they planted did not come to maturity, and the food supplies that the monarchs sent from Spain spoiled en route in the tropical climate of the Caribbean.

The Spanish monarchs responded by innovating. Whereas the Italians and Portuguese had sent one or two cargo ships to their trading posts every four or five years, Ferdinand and Isabella began sending several ships each year. Between February 1494 and October 1496, they sent four resupply fleets across the Atlantic to their new trading post. Such a steady stream of traffic between the homeland and its colonies became characteristic of Spanish colonization. Except for 1497, ships have crossed between Spain and the Americas every year since 1492. This continuous contact and interaction linked the Americas, Africa, and Europe (and later Asia) together into a single new world.

The next change came in the partnership agreement between Columbus and the monarchs. Ferdinand and Isabella wanted Columbus to find a route around the new continent to Asia but realized that he could not do that and manage their partnership at the same time. However, they were disturbed by the many reports from returnees about Columbus’s mismanagement of the post’s royal storehouse and his adversarial relations with the Spanish and Indian residents of the islands. Accordingly, in late 1497, they suspended the Santa Fe Capitulations for 1498, 1499, and 1500 until the accounts from the first two voyages could be audited.

Once again, in the face of the new American reality, the monarchs innovated. While the Santa Fe Capitulations were suspended, Ferdinand and Isabella authorized joint-stock companies in Seville to finance exploratory voyages to South America. The monarchs, as the majority stockholders, invited Andalusian investors to buy shares of stock in this unincorporated business enterprise—a new form of capitalization that would become the norm for later French, English, and Dutch ventures in the New World. The stockholders meeting in Seville in 1497 instructed their expedition to explore, map, and colonize the coast of this continent that Columbus had described as “another world.” Eleven voyages under the command of various Spanish captains had mapped the coast of South and Central America, from modern Brazil to Panama, by 1503. Hundreds of Spanish men and women emigrated as colonists on these voyages but suffered an appalling rate of death by shipwreck, starvation, disease, and warfare with the Native Americans.

The urgency of the food shortage on the island of Hispaniola meant that the resupply fleets could not be delayed in Seville or Cádiz waiting for Columbus in the Caribbean to invest his share of the cost. So in their 1497 instructions for Columbus’s third voyage, Ferdinand and Isabella laid out their plans to colonize
the Americas on the same model the Castilians employed in Spain. Thirty Spanish farmers went to Hispaniola on Columbus's third voyage, sent to cultivate European crops to feed the trading post staff and resupply ships that would, they hoped, soon be trading with the Asian mainland.

The monarchs instructed Columbus to establish regular free towns, as opposed to trading posts, with private farms and common lands, and to take Spanish women to the colonies. The names and identities of just four of these pioneer women are known: Catalina de Sevilla accompanied her husband, a noncommissioned officer named Pedro de Salamanca; Gracia de Segovia may have been single and traveling alone; Catalina de Egipcio and María de Egipcio, gypsy women convicted of murder, emigrated to take advantage of a royal offer to commute their sentences after they had put in ten years of unpaid service in the Americas.

The monarchs' doubts about Columbus's administrative abilities meanwhile intensified. As soon as they landed in 1498, the colonists on his third voyage rebelled against his attempts to prevent them from establishing new towns. But Columbus was unwilling to set up towns because a town would have a free marketplace that would compete with his monopoly. He tried to negotiate some sort of arrangement with the settlers that would preserve his interests in the company store, which by now had been moved to Santo Domingo, a new town on the south coast.

Conflicts immediately erupted, however, because in the minds of the Spanish settlers this was not an issue for negotiation; they believed that the workings of the municipal tradition of Spain had been implicit in their contracts. In this revolt they won the support and leadership of the island's highest legal officer appointed by Columbus, the appellate judge, Francisco de Roldán.

The colonists' complaints to the monarchs about Columbus's uncompromising determination to control all importing and exporting of merchandise through the company store and to prevent the functioning of free town marketplaces led the monarchs to send an investigative judge to the island in 1500. He stripped Columbus of his offices and sent the admiral and his brothers back to Spain to be judged by the monarchs. They gradually reinstated Columbus in some of his offices and privileges but appointed a new governor and a new manager.

Furthermore, the monarchs' faith in Columbus as a businessman appears to have been permanently destroyed by the audits of his first two voyages. Their disillusionment shaped their instructions to the new manager of the trading post, Fernando de Monroy. Columbus and his Genoese contractors in Seville had been responsible for deciding what to send for their one-eighth of the cargo carried by the huge fleet that transported the new governor, Nicolás de Ovando, to Hispaniola in 1500. The merchandise included heavy English wool broadcloth. At the end of 1501, Ferdinand and Isabella commended Monroy for not having accepted this merchandise: "We have seen what you wrote us about the merchandise that they sent you as part of Admiral Christopher Columbus's one-eighth according to the Capitulation. . . . And because these were things that could not be sold
quickly there and were over priced, you did well not to accept them.” In short, Ferdinand and Isabella understood the reality of the Caribbean climate, but Columbus and his fellow Italians were still trying to carry on a traditional Europe-to-Asia trade in wool cloth.

By 1501, the monarchs were insisting that Spaniards in the Caribbean live in towns: “It is our wish that the Christians living on the island of La Española shall not live dispersed from now on. Make sure that no one lives outside of the towns that have been established on the island and that each can have a hut or cabin on his fields where he can stay when he goes to inspect or plow his land.” The founding of free towns had by this time taken precedence over all other considerations in royal policy. Profits from the royal monopoly, contracts with Columbus, the company store—all were intolerable to the colonists. They had come to the Americas with the understanding that they would be free citizens of Spanish towns, and they knew exactly what that involved. They expected to have their own farms as private property, live in a town nucleus with its free marketplace for the sale of their produce and manufactures, and govern themselves, their marketplace, and their commons through democratic town meetings and an annually elected town council.

The practice of having a royal company store and monopoly continued to be a disincentive to emigration and an impediment to peaceful government in the colony. In 1503, the colonists sent a delegation to Ferdinand and Isabella to complain about the company store’s inappropriate merchandise and its excessively high prices. By the end of the year, the monarchs concluded that colonization could not be successful as long as the colonial towns were not permitted to trade in European goods in their own marketplaces. Towns, they decided, were more important than profit.

Ferdinand and Isabella never renewed the partnership with Columbus after it expired in 1500, nor did they form partnerships with other businessmen. The risks of the American trade proved too high to be limited to just a few individuals or joint-stock companies. The Americas trade could be profitable only with a high volume of transatlantic traffic and sales. The monarchs therefore needed to attract as many investors as possible.

Ferdinand and Isabella decided to end the royal monopoly and open the Americas to free trade for all Spaniards. A decree to that effect went into effect on July 28, 1504. Instead of profiting from a monopolistic partnership, the monarchs now profited by imposing royal fees and import-export taxes collected from all passengers and merchandise passing through closely regulated ports in Spain and the Americas. The next year, on March 5, 1505, King Ferdinand opened the Americas to free trade by foreign residents of Spain, as long as their partners and agents in the Americas were royal subjects.

To Columbus this was the unkindest cut of all. Back in Spain in 1504 and 1505 he wrote frequently to his son Diego at court, railing against free trade and complaining that anyone could now send merchandise to the Indies without having a partnership or a contract with him. He instructed Diego to lobby friends
at court to reverse free trade, but the monarchy refused. Free trade for all Spaniards remained the colonial policy.

The transformation from royal trading post to free towns, from company store to town marketplace, attracted a new type of settler. The new colonial towns, with their growing families, changed the nature of Spanish commerce. Packed in among their boxes of weapons and barrels of gunpowder, ships from Spain now carried supplies for family life. In 1509, for example, Dr. Diego Alvarez Chanca (about 1463—about 1515) and his wife, Ana de Zurita, formed a commercial company in Seville to export merchandise to the colonies. Their bills of lading demonstrate how much had changed in the ten years since Ferdinand and Isabella had initiated their colonial policy. Now the exports included items of women's clothing and adornment: married women's caps, ladies' neckcloths, hair nets, and chemises. Furthermore, Dr. Chanca and his wife sent supplies for the care of the sick, which was traditionally the wife's responsibility: 150 boxes of quince paste (renowned as a laxative), ten casks of white wine, three casks of fine wheat flour, two barrels of honey, medicinal herbs, and drugs.

Ferdinand and Isabella responded creatively and appropriately to rapidly changing realities. The necessity of innovating came out of the American environment, from the interactions of natives and Europeans, from the new world that was being created year by year in the Caribbean. Those who did not adjust fell behind, which is what happened to Christopher Columbus. By the time he died in 1506, the old world of monopolies in which he had carved a place for himself was gone. He had not found a way to play an equally important role in the new world of free markets. When the Spanish interest shifted to the Mexican mainland, innovations had already shaped the Spanish colonies on the Caribbean islands. These colonies had by then become a world of family farms; of households of men, women, and children; of local civic government; of free trade.

The degree to which concerns regarding municipal society and citizenship dominated the thoughts of even the most rebellious Castilian can be seen in the actions of the Cortés expedition. Historians now recognize that the expedition's decision to march on Mexico City (Tenochtitlán), to confront the emperor Moctezuma, was an act of rebellion against the Spanish royal governor in Cuba. The rebels rejected the governor's instructions for the expedition, which were to return to Cuba after exploring the coast and rescue enslaved Spaniards. They set up their own government by establishing the town of Veracruz—against the governor's orders—and appealed directly to Emperor Charles V for recognition. They did not organize themselves into a county, a kingdom, or an empire but instead created the same sort of municipal government they were familiar with as citizens of Castilian towns. They took it for granted that the king would want his royal dominions on the American continent to be organized into municipalities. They also needed an excuse to evade their governor's instructions and do what they wanted to do—march on the Mexican capital of Tenochtitlán. For this purpose they decided to form a municipal militia. To do this, however, they first needed to establish a municipality, which is how Veracruz came about.
Shortly after disembarking on the coast of present-day Mexico, Hernán Cortés received a messenger, named Tlillanalqui, from the Aztec emperor. Cortés relied on Marina, also called Malinche, to act as the translator. In this image, Cortés is identified as the Marqués, the title he received after his conquest of the Aztec capital city.

Cortés's plan to establish a town in order to set up a municipal militia that could attack Tenochtitlán was a rebellious act that aroused controversy among his fellow Spaniards. Those who were allies of Governor Diego Velázquez wanted to return to Cuba, arguing that they had accomplished the objectives of the expedition. They pointed out that the governor had not authorized the expedition to establish a settlement, as Cortés had advertised in Cuba; the governor's written instructions to Cortés authorized the expedition only to explore the land and ransom shipwrecked Spaniards (who had been enslaved by Indians). Not only did the Spaniards lack the supplies and people to settle, argued the dissenting members of the expedition; they did not have even the possibility of future support from Cuba. Cortés appeared to go along with this argument.

But secretly Cortés and his allies had decided to resist any move to abandon the mainland. They initiated discussions with individual members of the expedition, lobbying for votes in preparing for a town meeting. During the night, several leaders came to solicit Bernal Díaz del Castillo's vote, pointing out the futility and waste of expeditions that came only to ransom and explore without settling. But to settle in defiance of the governor's instructions would make them outlaws. The solution they proposed was to form a town council and petition the king for recognition of it as a municipality, bypassing the governor's authority. Cortés's men argued to Díaz that if the allies elected Cortés as the captain of their municipal militia in a town meeting, then Cortés, instead of being the governor's appointed commander, "could do it in the king's name and then send the news directly to the king our lord in Castile. And be sure, sir, to cast your vote, so that all of us elect him unanimously as captain, because it will be to the service of God and the king our lord."

The next day, a meeting convened and demanded that Cortés found a town. The men complained that it had been wrong to bring them under false pretenses, that in Cuba Cortés had announced that he was going to settle but instead had come to ransom, and they demanded for the sake of God and the king that he settle a town immediately. They added other good arguments, pointing out that the
natives would not let them land in peace again, that other soldiers would certainly come from the islands to help them if the land were settled by Spaniards, and that Governor Velázquez had knowingly sent them on a fool’s errand by advertising that he had authority from the king to settle when the contrary was true. Finally, the rebels said they “wanted to settle, and whoever did not want to could go back to Cuba.”

Cortés agreed finally to settle a town, but only after a great show of “beg me to do what I want,” as the Spanish saying goes, and on condition that they would elect him interim judge and captain-general and agree to give him one-fifth of all the gold they might acquire after setting aside the royal fifth. The harshness of this last condition gave rise to heated discussions that prolonged the meeting over several days. But the men finally agreed to Cortés’s terms in order to get their town. Then a royal notary, Diego de Godoy, drafted a letter to the king, in which they explained this rebellious act in the most loyal and traditional terms: “It seemed to all of us better that a town with a court of justice be founded and inhabited in your royal highnesses’ name so that in this land also you might have sovereignty as you have in your other kingdoms and dominions. For once the land has been settled by Spaniards, in addition to increasing your royal highnesses’ dominions and revenues, you may be so gracious as to grant favors to us and to the settlers who come in the future.”

Cortés then proceeded to found a town, which exists to this day on the Gulf of Mexico directly east of Mexico City. He appointed the usual municipal officials—two judges, a sheriff, a treasurer, an accountant, and councilmen—erected the symbols of town jurisdiction (a column of justice and a gallows), and named the town Veracruz (true cross), because they had disembarked on Good Friday, April 22, 1519. The founding citizens began improvising homes while exploring the surrounding areas and forming alliances with some 30 Indian towns.

Having carried out a rebellion, they contrived to lend it legitimacy by acting as a town. The town council convened and demanded that Cortés show them the written instructions in which Governor Velázquez had authorized him to come to the mainland. In the process they discovered that Cortés’s commission had expired, and he could no longer exercise the offices of captain or appellate judge. The council, which now found itself the only legitimate Spanish authority on the mainland, appointed Cortés as the town militia’s captain and interim judge. Then they sent a letter to the emperor explaining what they had done: “We appointed Cortés . . . and received from him the customary oath in the service of your majesties, and we accepted him in our town meeting and council as interim appellate judge and captain in your royal name.”

While this letter was traveling back to Spain, a matter of six or seven weeks, Cortés and the expedition members began building the new town’s residential nucleus to make good their claim of having settled a new municipality. According to Díaz, “Everyone from Cortés, who was the first to start digging out dirt and stones for laying the foundations, down to every captain and soldier set to it and worked to finish the town and fortress quickly, some working on the
foundations, others on building walls, others bringing water, some working in the lime pits and in making bricks and tiles, others looking for food, or sawing lumber, the blacksmiths at their anvil, because we had two blacksmiths. In this way we worked on it without stopping from the greatest to the least, along with the Indians who helped us until the church and houses were roofed and the palisade built." As soon as the town was built, the municipal militia packed up their gear and, with their Indian allies, moved inland and began their march on Tenochtitlán.

The greatest problem that conquerors anywhere have faced has occurred whenever they have not had an opportunity to build from the ground up. Normally, when Christians conquered a Muslim city they were limited to an already existing town layout. As a result, there were two basic types of towns in Castile: the jumbled, unfocused warrens of towns and cities taken from the Muslims, such as Seville, Granada, and Madrid; and the newly founded towns and villages centered on an open plaza in the style of ancient Rome. While we tend to think of Granada as a typical medieval city, the Spaniards themselves found these Muslim urban agglomerations unnatural and never stopped trying to straighten them out. The city council minutes of Granada are discourses that go back centuries on widening and straightening streets, rationalizing city blocks, and opening up large, rectangular plazas.

In Granada the new city council organized after the conquest set itself to creating a rectangular open plaza and widening the streets. Muslim cities did not have open markets within the city walls; instead, their merchants carried on livestock markets in the open spaces outside the city’s walls. Within the city walls, retailers and artisans conducted their trade in small shops on the ground floors of their homes, along streets that were often so narrow and crooked that goods could be brought in only by humans or on pack animals. Granada’s commercial district under the Muslims was Elvira Street, which led from the city gate to the silk and wheat exchanges in the most narrow, crowded streets of the central city.

After the departure of the Muslims, the city council decided to enlarge a space in front of the city gate, called Bibrambla, to create a proper Castilian plaza. Demolishing the existing houses and shops to make room for this project and compensating their owners took years and cost a fortune. Typically, the council appointed four of its members to accompany the royal appeals judge on an inspection tour of the targeted buildings in order to appraise them “so that the city can pay their owners for them, in order to make the plaza.” But it soon became clear that the Plaza Bibrambla as originally envisioned would not be enough. As soon as a new section of the plaza was opened, it filled up with merchants’ stalls.

The continuity between Old and New World cities was this tradition of the medieval Spanish municipality designed for commerce. Granted, the similarities between Granada and Mexico City have not seemed striking to historians. For one thing, the members of the Cortés expedition were much too young to have participated in the conquest of Granada. Furthermore, other cities of the Iberian
Peninsula seemed to have closer ties with Mexico: Most of the trade and official correspondence for Mexico came from the city of Seville, and Mexico City's new fuero was modeled on that of the city of Toledo. Yet 30 years is historically a very short time, and several of the Spanish conquerors of Mexico boasted that their fathers and other ancestors had participated in the campaign against the Muslims of Granada. There thus seems every reason to suppose that the members of the Cortés expedition would have Granada on their minds when confronted with the task of remodeling and reorganizing the Mexican capital. The continuity of traditions cannot be clearer than to note that one of the city councilmen of Granada in 1513 was the young Antonio de Mendoza, who was already learning the art of creating plazas and widening streets in the Castilian tradition, to accommodate commercial activity. When Mendoza arrived in Veracruz in 1535 as the first viceroy of New Spain, his first act was to instruct the city council of Mexico City to straighten out and widen the city streets and build covered colonnades (sopor tales) around the city square to protect merchandise from the rain.

Conquest, of course, destroys the very prize it seeks to gain. The successful conqueror destroys walls, buildings, bridges, water systems, and people. Thus, only to the degree that conquerors are able to rebuild, repopulate, and govern does a prize city become worth the destruction. In August 1521, almost 30 years after the fall of Granada, Hernán Cortés conquered the city of Tenochtitlán, capital of the Aztec empire. Throughout the following centuries Spaniards remodeled the conquered city, reorganized its government, and converted the defeated population to Christianity. The Spaniards held a common ideal of what a city
Sixty years after the first encounter between the Spaniards and the Aztecs, the marketplace of Tlaxcala blended Spanish and indigenous elements. The town hall, jail, tavern, and royal offices surrounded the communal fountain and column of justice. The design of the buildings combines Spanish and Native American decorative elements. While a European cornice crowns the government buildings, the private buildings on the other sides of the square display distinctive indigenous design.

should look like and rebuilt both Granada and Tenochtitlán to fit that ideal. These were parallel actions, but they did not have parallel results. The difference lies in the affection we hold for any preconquest city.

The conquest of Tenochtitlán is usually told in a more savage way than that of Granada: as a tale of a fabulous metropolis, with monumental architecture and sophisticated technology, succumbing to the savagery of an insensitive, intolerant conquering society. In genres other than history, Tenochtitlán appears as a sort of floating fairyland, which first enchanted the Spaniards but then sank under their destructive embrace.

With Tenochtitlán, Cortés faced a uniquely difficult task of reconstruction, for the Aztec capital was destroyed by his troops as no other had been in the long history of Spanish conquest. Certainly, the level of destruction in Granada, the most important conquest of the previous generation, could not compare with Tenochtitlán's. Granada was indeed a fabled metropolis of exquisite architecture and sophisticated technology, but it suffered little physical damage because it surrendered in the early stages of the siege. Yet, despite Granada's nearly intact state, its Christian city council soon began demolishing buildings to create large plazas, straight streets, and a cathedral. In short, Granada, so different in the manner of its conquest, experienced the same degree of rebuilding as Tenochtitlán. The Spaniard's traditional sense of what a city should be could not tolerate the chaotic warren of city streets the Muslims left behind in Granada any more than it would have been able to accept Tenochtitlán's market transport system based on canals. Urban historians have often explained the orthogonal city plan as an attempt to impose upon the town new Renaissance concepts of rationality and rectilinearity.
The history of Spanish town planning in the Middle Ages suggests quite the opposite, however: Spaniards built towns in the New World in the same way they had built them for centuries in the Old. The rectangular plaza shaped Spanish towns and villages from ancient Roman to modern times; this design was not a Renaissance innovation imposed by royal fiat. Spanish towns often did not end up with straight streets, square blocks, or rectangular plazas, but town councils struggled for centuries to achieve this ideal.

Central Mexico fulfilled many of the aspirations and hopes of the Spaniards because it was civilized—a society that lived in cities. Since the organization and government of native cities did not fit European legal definitions of “city,” “town,” or “village,” the conquerors referred to them with the Spanish generic term “pueblo” (municipality). As the Spaniards moved north, however, they encountered the same conditions they had explored in the Caribbean, Central America, and the east coast of South America, where transhumant peoples migrated from coastal settlements to inland villages with the seasons and the weather, never erecting permanent buildings or organizing pueblos. To the Spaniards, these were not civilized people.

Even their great champion Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566) regarded the Caribbean islanders as primitives on this basis. On every other ground of comparison—religious sophistication, familial relations, economic productivity, native intelligence, capacity for war—he regarded the islanders as civilized. But they lived, as he noted in his *Apológética historia sumaria* (Brief Historical Defense), “scattered and isolated, not in settlements with the form of cities, and others did not even live in large or small settlements but wandered without order like savages.” The nonurban character of the Caribbean Indians demonstrated, Las Casas suggested, that they lacked the essential political experience of civilized societies. In this respect, as in many others, Las Casas drew his argument from Aristotle, who had written in his treatise *On Politics*: “It is evident that the polis [Greek, “city,” as in “metropolis”) belongs to the class of things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature an animal intended to live in a polis. He who is without polis, by reason of his own nature and not of some accident, is either a poor sort of being, or a being higher than man; he is like the man of whom Homer wrote in denunciation, ‘Clanless and lawless and heartless is he.’”

Las Casas devoted his life to combating the idea that the Caribbean islanders lacked towns by reason of their own nature. Instead he argued that an accident of historical development accounted for the islanders’ lack of towns. He ignored his own earlier theological arguments and resorted instead to historical anthropology. By arguing that all social and cultural institutions, including those of the Europeans, develop through human experience over time, Las Casas could attribute the lack of towns on the islands to anthropological or developmental causes rather than defects in native intelligence. He explained that because the islanders had been encountered at an early stage of development common to all cultures, they only needed time and an appropriate example to achieve self-government in towns.
The role of the Spaniards, Las Casas argued, should be to bring the islanders together to live in nuclear towns and then, by teaching and example, develop the natives' skills until they, too, could form self-governing towns: "If any more should be discovered like those who were found on the mainland that we call Florida," he wrote, "they should be considered rational beings, reducible to order and reason." What the Spaniards must not do, Las Casas claimed, was to use slavery or physical force, which would prevent the potential development of the Caribbean natives into good citizens: "When such isolated and primitive people are found in the future, they should, with energy and discretion, love and tenderness, be induced to live together in society so that they may experience themselves the benefits of living a life of self government." The next generation of evangelizing priests tried to achieve this goal by creating in northern Mexico a new institution that had never existed in Spain, the mission church.

Much of the contrast between Cortés and Las Casas during their own lifetimes can be explained by how they each applied the same core of values to Native Americans with widely different lifestyles. Cortés moved decisively to the mainland, accepted the indigenous organizations as valid Indian municipalities (pueblos), and injected new Spanish towns among them. At the end of the 16th century, there were about 100 Spanish towns in New Spain and the Caribbean. They had come into being in the same way as Palos and Veracruz, founded by squatters in between already existing towns, although in Central Mexico those preexisting towns were Indian. The process and structure were the same in the Old World and the New because the intent was the same—to create a society of self-governing towns whether Indian or European.

Las Casas limited his experience to the islands of the Caribbean and parts of Central America. Because he held the same values of civilization that Cortés did, however, he could not recognize as valid the nonurban migratory life of the people he loved. He therefore kept inventing one scheme after another to organize them into self-governing towns.

The different backgrounds of the conqueror Cortés and the churchman Las Casas shaped their aspirations for Mexico. In Mexico, just as they did in the home country, the clergy single-mindedly pursued a program of converting people to a Christian lifestyle similar to their own priestly ideals. But lay people such as Bernal Díaz and Hernan Cortés took their religion for granted except in times of crisis. The chasm between these two groups—laypeople and clergy—had divided the Spaniards long before they encountered Mexico. Knights and municipal militiamen who fought against the Muslims in these battles described them as wars of territorial conquest and booty; the clergy described them as religious crusades.

The laypeople who initiated and carried out Spain's program of expansion never wavered in their purpose: Whether monarch, merchant, soldier, or royal administrator, commerce was their major motive for exploring west to the Americas. By 1519, they felt frustrated by a previously unknown continent blocking the way to Asia and were bitterly disappointed in the cultures and economies they
had encountered in the Americas. Their explorations of the Caribbean and the
coasts of Central and South America had brought welcome mineral resources but
nothing of what they had expected to find in Asia: no stone buildings or cities or
great marketplaces.

Tenochtitlán had all of these. Bernal Díaz seemed overcome: "It was all so
wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never
heard of, seen, or dreamed of before." Fortunately, he described it anyway, focusing
on the goods for sale in Tenochtitlán's largest marketplace, Tlatelolco. Beginning
with the most valuable merchandise—gold, silver, precious stones, feathers, cloaks, embroidered goods, male and female slaves, cloth, and choco-
late—Díaz proceeded to list a total of 65 different types of merchandise. He saw
Tenochtitlán as a great emporium, a well-stocked marketplace humming with
buyers and sellers.

Through its Renaissance transformation into a society organized for com-
merce, Spain went beyond conquest to take the lead in colonizing the Americas.
The institutions and customs that were most effective in rebuilding Castile went
on to shape Spanish settlement in America. Because town life was the norm for
Spaniards, they could not conceive of a civilization without municipalities. When
they found great cities in central Mexico, they rejoiced in this discovery of a civi-
lization previously unknown to Europeans. With few exceptions, they did not
destroy Indian pueblos but instead founded new Spanish towns in between the
established pueblos. Mexico therefore came to be, like Spain itself, patterned with
a few large cities surrounded by thousands of smaller autonomous towns.