

**Document 1****Which populations did well? Which poorly? When?**

Estimates of Changes in Population in Selected Regions, 1300-1700  
(population in millions)

	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700
<b>Americas</b>	<b>32 (28)</b>	<b>39 (30)</b>	<b>42 (41)</b>	<b>13 (15)</b>	<b>12 (10)</b>
Comparison					
Africa	68 (67)	68 (74)	87 (82)	113 (90)	107 (90)
Europe	70 (73)	52 (45)	67 (69)	89 (89)	95 (115)
China	83 (99)	70 (112)	84 (125) [155]	110 (140) [231]	150 (205)
India	100 (50)	74 (46)	95 (54)	145 (68)	175 (100)

NOTE: Figures on the left are 1979 estimates (source 1); figures in parentheses are 1954 estimates (source 2); figures in brackets for China, 1500 and 1600, are from 1999 (source 3).

Sources: 1. Based on J. R. Biraben, "Essai sur l'évolution du nombre des hommes," *Population* 34 (1979), 16, qtd. in *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*, David Christian (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 345. 2. M. K. Bennett, *The World's Food: A Study of the Interrelations of World Populations, National Diets, and Food Potentials* (New York: Harper, 1954), Table 1, reproduced in André Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1998), 168. 3. Dennis O'Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, "Cycles of Silver: Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century," *Journal of World History* 13, 2 (2002): 400.

**Document 2**

**Just how many inhabitants of America were there before European arrival touched off a large-scale die-off?**

Some Twentieth-Century Estimates of America's Total Native Population in the 1490s  
(add 000)

Estimate	Date of Estimate
40-50,000	1924
50-75,000	1928
13,101	1931
8,400	1939
13,170	1945
15,500	1952
100,000	1964
90,043-112,554	1966
33,300	1967
43,000-72,000	1976

Source: Based on Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 23, Table 2.1.

**Document 3****Estimated population of the European countries that had early contact with the Americas.**

Country	Approximately 1500 CE
France	15,000,000
Italy	10,000,000
Spain	6.5 to 10,000,000
British Isles	5,000,000
Portugal	1,250,000
Netherlands	less than 1,000,000
Total Europe (except Russia)	60 to 70,000,000

Source: Based on Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 36-7.

**Document 4**

**Historian John H. Elliott in 2006 assumed agreement on a 90 percent population decline, despite wide disagreement on total population figures.**

Estimates of the total population of the Americas on the eve of the arrival of the first Europeans have varied wildly, from under 20 million to 80 million or more. ... While the totals will always be a matter of debate, there is no dispute that the arrival of the Europeans brought demographic catastrophe in its train, with losses of around 90 percent in the century or so following the first contact. ... Forms of sickness that in Europe were not necessarily lethal brought devastating mortality rates to populations that had not built up the immunity that would enable them to resist.

In **Mesoamerica** the smallpox which ravaged the Mexica ... in 1520-21 ... was followed ... by waves of epidemics ... 1531-4, measles; 1545, typhus and pulmonary plague; ... 1550, mumps; 1559-63, measles, influenza, mumps, and diphtheria; 1576-80, typhus, smallpox, measles, mumps; 1595, measles. Comparable waves struck the people of the Andes. [Population decline] appears to have been of the order of 90 percent, although there were significant regional and local variations.

Source: John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), 64-5.

**Document 5**

**For comparison: Examples of European mortality rates from epidemics, 1346-1651.**

a) Die-offs [during the Black Death, a disease apparently new in Europe at least since about 500 CE] in Europe varied widely. Some small communities experienced total extinction. Others ... seem to have escaped entirely. ... The plague ... was propagated not solely by fleabites, but also [by] coughing or sneezing of an infected individual. [Such infections] were 100 percent lethal. ... In recent times, mortality rates for [flea-transmitted bubonic plague] varied between 30 and 90 percent. [However, in the fourteenth century not] everyone was exposed. Overall, the best estimate of plague-provoked mortality, 1346-50, in Europe as a whole is that about one-third of the total population died. ... Mortality clearly varied sharply from community to community. ... Moreover ... recurrent plagues followed at irregular intervals [about every 10 years]. A loss of 30 to 40 percent is [confirmed] by local studies in [Italy], France, Spain, England, and Germany.

b) In Uelzen [Germany] the plague of 1597 carried off 33 percent of the population ... Santander in Spain was virtually wiped off the map in 1599, losing 83 percent of its 3000 inhabitants. ... Mantua [Italy] in 1630 lost nearly 70 percent of its population, Naples and Genoa in 1656 nearly half theirs. ... [In a European population in the Americas] over the seventeenth century ... [among] the English emigrants ... in Barbados, it took approximately 150,000 immigrants to produce a population of 20,000 ...

Sources: a) William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), 147-8; last two lines from: Massimo Livi Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*, trans. Carl Ipsen (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 49. b) M. J. Seymour, *The Transformation of the North Atlantic World, 1492-1763: An Introduction* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 156.

**Document 6**

**Historian and historiographer David P. Henige in 1998 cast doubt on population estimates for pre-European contact with Native Americans.**

In the 1930s the population of the western hemisphere at the time of the arrival of the Europeans was estimated at 8 million. Some fifty years later it was asserted that ... no fewer than 51.6 million American Indians were living in central Mexico alone, and up to 70 million were living elsewhere. ... [T]his change was not grounded in an increase in the amount of direct evidence available. In fact, during this fifty-year period there was no change in the evidence at all ...

Source: David P. Henige, *Numbers from Nowhere: The American Indian Contact Population Debate* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 23.

**Document 7**

**Demographer Massimo Livi Bacci in 1997 gave reasons for questioning a high population estimate for pre-conquest central Mexico.**

It is difficult to accept the [estimate for central Mexico's pre-conquest population, originally published in 1963 and regularly quoted since] of 25 million: given the restricted area in which the population must have been concentrated, its density would have been about 50 persons per square kilometer, considerably higher than that of the most densely populated country area of Europe at the time (Italy, with about 35 persons per square kilometer). Considering the fairly rudimentary technology of the indigenous population, the harshness of the terrain, and the moderate productivity of their agriculture, one is inclined to [accept the more careful estimate] of well below 10 million.

Source: Massimo Livi Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*, trans. Carl Ipsen (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997), 58.

**Document 8**

**Historian Robert McCaa in 1995 cited agreement that the rate of Mexican population decline fell between 55 and 96 percent, and argued for multiple causes.**

There is agreement that a demographic disaster occurred and that epidemic disease was a dominant factor. ... But the role of disease cannot be understood without taking into account massive harsh treatment (forced migration, enslavement, abusive labor demand, and exorbitant tribute payments) and ecological devastation accompanying Spanish colonization. Killing associated with war and conquest was clearly a secondary factor, except in isolated cases. ... [He added that] whatever the estimate of the size of population of central Mexico before the conquest, nine scholars out of ten estimate the population decline ... [1519-95 was] somewhere between 55 and 96 percent.

Source: Robert McCaa, "Smallpox and Demographic Catastrophe in Mexico: What can Spanish and Náhuatl Narratives tell us that Numbers Cannot?" Unpublished manuscript, 1995, qtd. in *A Concise History of World Population*, Massimo Livi Bacci, trans. Carl Ipsen (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997), 58, n. 56.

**Document 9****Historical demographer Ryan Johansson warned in 1982 of bias in population estimates.**

The most important thing to remember in evaluating competing [population] estimates is that, with few exceptions, most are overtly or covertly influenced by ... political ... biases. Generally, the first estimates of the total number of inhabitants of the New World at the time of contact were contributed by “pro-Europeans.” ... Europeans were regarded as colonizing a vast land with [few] people, and the subsequent demise or decline of the sparse native population was not seen as a tragedy ... [High] population estimates by “pro-nativists” ... created in and of itself the problem of explaining how so many people could seemingly disappear so fast.

Source: Qtd. in Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 35.