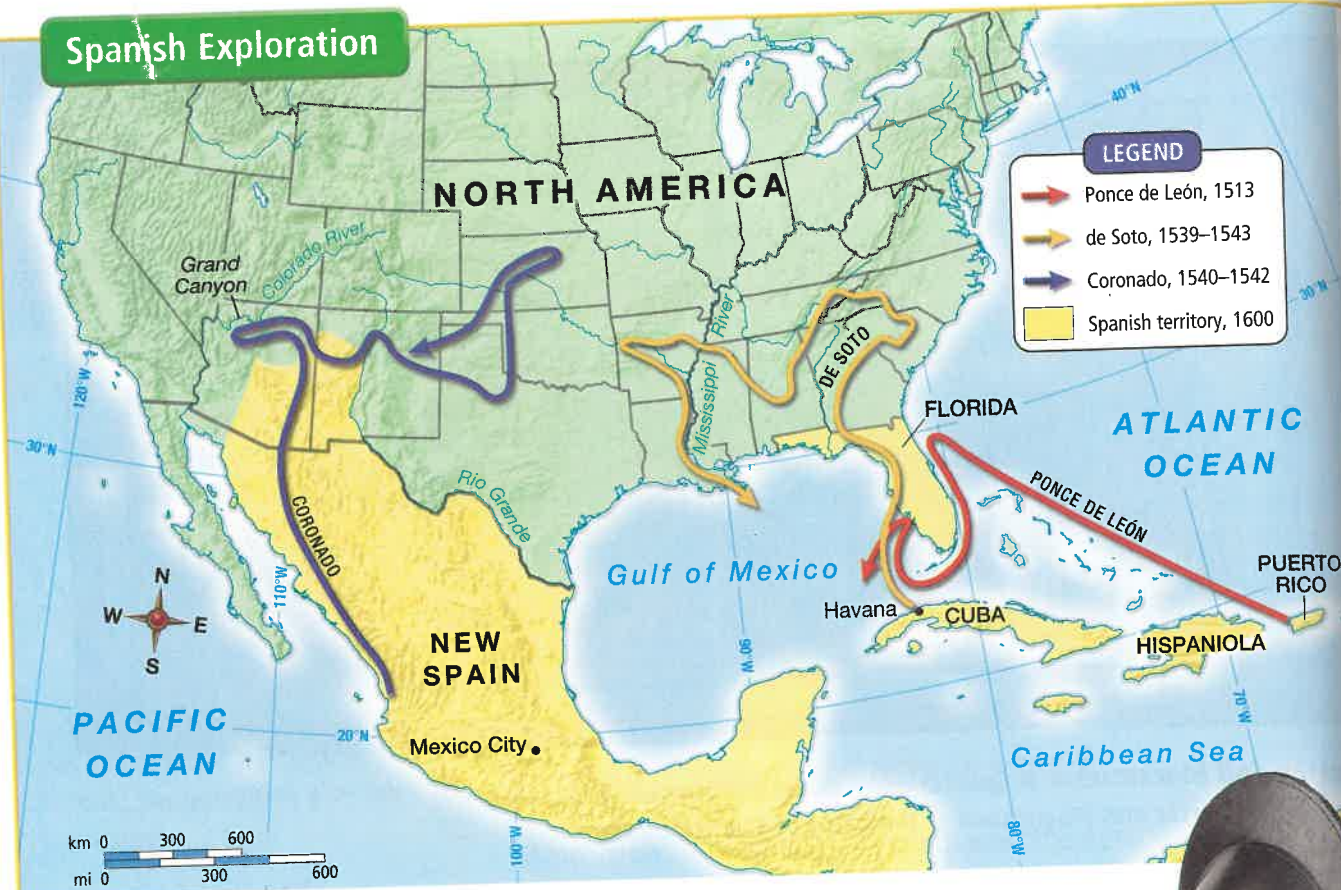


## Spanish Exploration



**Three Explorers** This map shows the routes of de Soto, Ponce de León, and Coronado across North America. **SKILL** Reading Maps Which explorer crossed the Mississippi River?

Spanish helmet



## Exploring North America

**Main Idea** Spanish explorers went to the southern parts of the present-day United States looking for gold.

Conquistadors also explored North America in their search for gold. The first conquistador to reach the land that is now the United States was **Juan Ponce de León** (pon seh deh leh OHN). In 1513, he led an expedition to present-day Florida. Ponce de León claimed Florida for Spain. He was looking for a “fountain of youth” that legend said could make old people young again. A legend is a story handed down from earlier times.

In 1539, Spain sent a conquistador named **Hernando de Soto** to conquer and settle Florida and the lands beyond.

De Soto went to present-day Georgia. From there, he traveled thousands of miles through the American Southeast. De Soto was the first European explorer to reach the Mississippi River.

Along the way, De Soto found many American Indians but no riches. The conquistadors fought and enslaved American Indians they met. Many Spanish died in battles as well. De Soto died in 1542, without starting any settlements in North America.

In 1540, a conquistador named **Francisco Vásquez de Coronado** led an expedition into North America. Coronado was looking for cities of gold that he had heard about in legends.