

The Spanish Armada

Introduction

Tensions between Spain and England grew in the late sixteenth century as each country sought greater influence in the Americas. In the 1570s and 1580s, Sir Francis Drake led English attacks on Spanish vessels and raided Spanish settlements in the Americas. In 1588, Spain's King Philip II ordered a naval invasion of England. Philip's Spanish Armada of 124 ships, 27,000 men, and 1,100 guns departed from Lisbon on May 30, 1588. England meanwhile, led by Queen Elizabeth I, readied a counterforce of 197 vessels, 16,000 men, and 2000 guns. The Spanish fleet entered the English Channel on July 30, and the two sides engaged in skirmishes for the next few days as the Spanish moved north. On August 8, the fighting culminated in the Battle of Gravelines, in which the English navy decisively defeated the Armada. What remained of the badly damaged Spanish fleet returned to Spain by sailing up through the North Sea, around the British Isles, and into the Atlantic.

Such imperial rivalries in Europe greatly affected how Europeans perceived and interacted with the Americas and its peoples. Whether based on a quest for territory, gold, souls, or national pride, the Americas became a new arena for ongoing battles for dominance in Europe that were now spreading around the globe.

Questions for Discussion

Click on the image; study the image and practice using the Viewer-Navigator. Base your answers on the information in the introduction, your knowledge of history, and the information from the map.

1. Define the term "Armada." Why were the English and Spanish in conflict?
2. Use the names of locations on the map to identify the geographic area where the English and Spanish fleets met and identify the nations on the map. Locate these areas on a modern physical-political map.
3. What advantage would the English have over the Spanish?

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Image



Expeditionis Hispanorum in Angliam, 1588, by Robert Adams (London, 1590). (Library of Congress, Geography & Map Division)